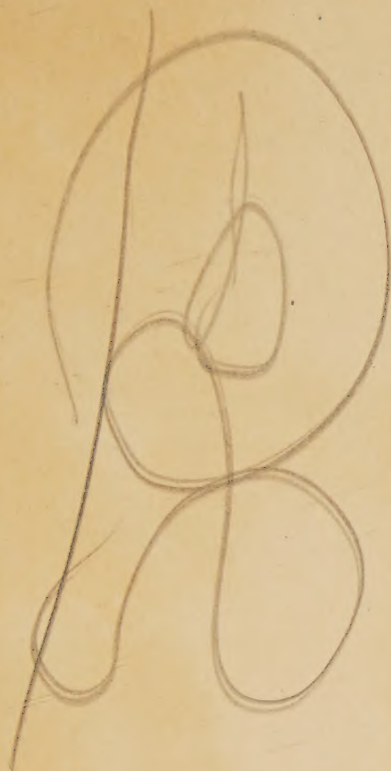


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ISABEL STIRLING

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BY

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PART ONE

I

At the age of four, Isabel was consumed by a desire to go to church and hear "preaching." What preaching might be, she could not imagine. She only knew that every Sunday her grandmother and her father put on their best clothes and went out of the front door, leaving her to a dull morning with Norah. For her dolls and all her other playthings were put away, owing to a tiresome rule made by a great person called God. Sunday was God's day, she was told. He was a person whom she could not see, although she was taught to talk to Him when she went to bed, and to listen when Father talked to Him in the morning and before each meal. He could see her, it seemed, at all times, and very especially when she was naughty. In fact, there was no getting away from Him. That preaching had something to do with Him, she gathered, for they said they went to His house. In that case, they probably saw Him. Her heart beat faster at the idea, but she was more excited than frightened, for she could always hold fast to Grandma's hand. Grandma had told her about beautiful angels, too, and they would probably be there. Moreover, this child was so constituted that, from the beginning to the end of her life, if there were anything to see, she wanted to see it, and if there were anything unusual to do, she wanted to do it.

She had often begged to be taken with them to church,

and Father, who never took her part, had actually said, on the occasion when he happened to hear her, that she ought to go; but Grandma had said, "Not yet, William." There had been a little more talk about it and Grandma had said, "Wait until she is five, at any rate;" and Father had not said anything more.

Isabel now looked forward to her birthday. Hitherto she had been too young to notice that Father stayed in his study all that day, and she did not remember that Grandma had kept her particularly quiet. But Jessie, next door, had a party and presents on birthdays and last year, when she had asked why she too did not have such things, Grandma had hugged her tight without saying anything, and then had gone down to the village and bought her a doll. This year there was to be something better than a doll or a party.

On the Sunday morning after the fifth birthday she was dressed in all the bravery of her best clothes, topped by her adored little pink satin bonnet, out of which, between golden-brown curls, peered a pair of very serious dark-fringed gray eyes.

"You'll remember," admonished Grandma, "that you must sit perfectly still and not squirm around or make a sound."

She promised readily and walked sedately by Grandma's side, down the hill and along the village street and up the long flight of wooden steps which led to the door of the church. Her breath came quickly as they entered. Heaven knows what strange scene of enchantment she expected to behold. She might well have been disappointed, for that old, white-painted Presbyterian church was a bare enough place. No stained glass met her eager gaze, only enormous, many-paned windows with green, shuttered blinds, plain white walls, severe-looking pews, each with its door which fastened with a button and its long, slanting shelf in front, with a narrower shelf underneath. On the seats were thin cushions covered with faded red baize and there was a wooden footstool running the whole length of the pew. Isabel liked the pews

and the under shelf, with its fascinating look of secrecy, but the saving touch was in the purple velvet curtains behind the pulpit. They hung in long, straight folds and were decorated with heavy cords and tassels. Back in her baby soul was something which responded to the mystery of those purple velvet folds. Red curtains would have impressed her much less. She pictured to herself vast and dim recesses beyond and knew that Something was there—probably God and the angels. At the proper times those cords would draw the curtains back and let them all come through. Then there would be “preaching.” Years after that, even when she knew quite well that those purple curtains only covered a blank white wall, Isabel could not divest herself of the idea that there really were mysterious depths beyond—that the white wall would open if one only knew the magic word.

Presently the organ began to play and, cautiously turning her head, she saw the high gallery at the other end of the church. More mystery was there, for the gallery also had curtains, small ones. It looked inaccessible, like an impossibly big mantelpiece, yet there were people up there, for heads appeared from time to time above the curtains. The music of the organ was enchanting, although a little terrifying. There were moments when it sent a quiver through her and made a lump in her throat. She got hold of Grandma’s hand and squeezed it tight. Then a whole row of heads appeared above the curtain and sang. Grandma did not prevent her turning around to look at them and it seemed to her that she knew some of them, for there surely was Miss Emma, with her wavy red hair, and fat Mr. Anderson, with his beard sticking out straight. When they stopped singing all the heads dropped down out of sight. Then *Father*—yes, it certainly was Father, and she had just begun to wonder what had become of him—Father stood up in front of the purple curtains and talked. This was exciting at first, but soon grew tiresome, for it went on for such a long, long time. Sometimes, to be sure, he stopped and the music began again, but most of the time it was

just Father, talking grown-up talk that she couldn't even try to understand. When, oh, when would he stop and pull the cords and let God and the angels come through? Isabel hardly dared look at the gallery again lest she should miss something.

And then, after all, there was nothing at all! More singing, more talking, and then the people began to go out of the church. She turned her head and looked up once more and had a glimpse of the singers in profile, a row of bodiless heads gliding away to some mysterious exit. Sadly she allowed Grandma to lead her out. Many ladies stopped and spoke to her. All through her childhood it seemed to Isabel that ladies were stopping her to say unnecessary things. She tugged at Grandma's hand to hurry her up. As for her father, he was nowhere to be seen.

"You behaved very nicely," said Grandma, when they had finally left all the ladies behind and were walking up the hill together.

"But where was the preaching?" asked Isabel.

"Why, your father did preach," replied Grandma. "You heard him."

"No, he just stood up and talked," persisted Isabel.

"But that was preaching," said Grandma. "He told them about God, and what they should do to please Him."

"And is that all that preaching is?"

"Yes," replied Grandma. "He preached a sermon."

Isabel was shy about telling of her disappointment and walked soberly home, holding Grandma's hand. It was always a comfort to hold that hand.

When the pink bonnet was restored to its box and the best frock was exchanged for an every-day one, Isabel cast about for something to do in the interval before dinner. She was very hungry and wished that Norah would hurry up. The sitting-room was bare and unhome-like in its Sunday aspect, with the toys all put away in the closet. The child knelt on a chair by the window and gazed out at the trees with their red and yellow

leaves. Now and then a leaf detached itself from its branch and floated in a leisurely way through the air. The garden beds were almost covered with the leaves which had fallen, and perhaps after dinner, when Father was in his study (which happened to be on the other side of the house) Grandma would let her go out and play about among them. She looked across the garden to the road, and across the road to the creek in its ravine, and to the hills beyond—green, tree-dotted hills, sloping gently upward to meet the sky. Then, with a sudden recollection of the heads in the gallery, an idea came to her and Sunday rules went clean out of her head. Grandma was upstairs and there was no one to warn her, so she got down from her chair and ran to the closet and dragged out her big box of blocks. She would build that church mantelpiece and set up a row of dolls behind it. Sitting flat on the floor, head bent over so that her curls covered her intent face, she was putting the last touch on the architectural structure when a terrible voice sounded over her head. Father had come into the room.

"Isabel!" said the voice.

She looked up, trembling, the picture of guilt.

"You know you are doing what you have been told not to do."

She was too frightened even to plead that she had forgotten.

"You know what happens to you when you disobey. Come with me!"

He held out his hand and she gave him her little cold one and was led into the unused room off his study—a room always darkened and cold and associated only with punishments. She wept bitterly, but as much from anger and a sense of injustice as from the pain of punishment.

"Stop crying!" he ordered, as he left her alone in the room, and she tried to stifle her sobs.

Presently the dinner-bell rang and he came back and led her into the dining-room and lifted her to her chair. He carved the meat, helped his mother and put a smaller

portion on a plate and, cutting it up with the carving-knife, placed it before the child. Grandma hastened to add the mashed potato and gravy and began to ask Father questions about something or other, but she could not keep him from seeing that Isabel's food remained untouched.

"Eat your dinner!" he commanded.

"I don't want any dinner," quavered Isabel.

"Eat your dinner!"

She stuck her fork into a piece of meat and lifted it to her mouth. As her father turned his head away she looked at him with hatred in her glance.

"Isabel," said Grandma, "I left my handkerchief upstairs. Won't you go up and look in my top drawer and get me a clean one?"

As she went upstairs Isabel heard Grandma talking to Father. She took as long as she could to find the handkerchief, but when she came down Grandma was still talking and just as she opened the dining-room door she heard her say:

"The trouble with you, William, is that you are a rebel. You have never forgiven God—and you are taking it out on the child."

When she got into the room Father was looking very red and angry. He was going to say something, but stopped when he saw her. What did "rebel" mean? And what was it about God, Father always said that God would not forgive unless one was sorry. Did God have to be sorry, too? She almost forgot her troubles in her curiosity. But Grandma began to talk about the weather.

As soon as the meal was over Isabel slipped away and ran upstairs to Grandma's room. It seemed to her the safest place. And Grandma's lap, into which she soon cuddled, was a good refuge; and Bible stories were both soothing and entertaining. There were other stories, however, which she liked better. She put persuasive arms around Grandma's neck.

"Now tell me," she coaxed, "about my little uncles and

aunts. I haven't forgotten. Little Aunt Lucy was sweet and had light hair. And little Aunt Janey always laughed. And little Uncle Johnny used to hug—just like this. And they all died in a week of scarlet fever. Tell me about them again."

Grandma held her close. "I don't think I need to, dearie."

"And then there was Uncle Dan," went on Isabel, proud to show that she remembered. "He grew up and helped you. Tell me some more about them all."

"Not now, darling. I can't talk now."

"Not even about Mother?"

Grandma was silent and the child, looking up, saw tears in her eyes and was awestruck. So she sat very still and presently dropped asleep, while Grandma held her close and thought of many things. Why, she was wondering, of all her children, should there be left to her only the ones who had inherited from her husband's harsh mother that sombre temper which made them so depressing to live with? And to think that in becoming a minister William had grown to believe that his severity had a religious justification. He ought to have been anything else. As to religion—of course she and their father had brought the children up to believe the very things which now seemed so much less important. When you are young you can bear up against that kind of religion, but not when you are old. Grandma had outlived much of her early creed. She had her doubts about Hell. She was pretty tired of life, and sad to think that all she and her John had to show for their joys and sorrows and struggles was the one little grandchild—and William and Eliza, of course. Poor Eliza! Happiness would have agreed with her, but William had stopped that; William and her own stern creed. Yes, there were the children in Heaven, but—what would it all be like? The only thing you were really sure of was old Earth. Yet it would be an adventure—dying; and John would be sure to be the same; and she would gladly go and try it. Only—there was Isabel.

True, William might marry again, even though he had never cared for anyone but poor pretty Bell, and had never forgiven God or the baby for her death. But he was only thirty-five—and all those women running after him. That gave food for thought, too. She must try to live for the child's sake.

II

FROM five to six is a long step, when you are the one who takes it. At six, Isabel felt that she was a person of knowledge and experience. Under Grandma's teaching, she could read pretty well, if the words were not too long. Also, although she did not go to school, she went regularly to Sunday-school, where she learned a number of hymns and many texts from the Bible, as well as an amount of Calvinistic doctrine extraordinary for so small a child. Of course, she had known for a long time that there were such places as Heaven and Hell and that one was likely—in fact, certain—to die and go to one or the other of them, according as one obeyed God or the Devil. Not your body, of course. That went into the ground. But your soul, which was You, inside of your body. As to the way in which it got out of your body, Isabel had her own theory. If you had been naughty, the Devil got you, whether you liked him or not. On the other hand, in order to get to Heaven, where the little angels played on harps, it wasn't enough to be good. You must love God besides. To love God—that was such a difficult thing to do. You loved Grandma—dearly. Of Father and God you were about equally afraid. Isabel thought a great deal about these things as she played with her dolls in her solitary fashion, but she did not talk about them. It was a pity she did not talk to Grandma, but a child's reserve is impenetrable.

She did not have to play alone quite all the time. Down the steep hill in the back yard was a rickety flight of wooden steps, and at the bottom a level space before you got to the fence. This space was shaded by a big apple-tree, and in the fence was a small gate opening into the Giffords's back yard. Jessie Gifford was allowed to come through the gate and as far as the steps whenever she

liked, and there the two had established their playground; too small a place for active sports, but large enough for dolls' housekeeping. Unfortunately, Jessie, who was seven, went to school and was only available at off times and on Saturdays. However, they made the most of those times.

Just now, their favorite game was "cemetery." On the way home from school Jessie passed a stone-cutter's yard and picked up the most fascinating bits of marble. To be sure, they were not shaped very regularly for tombstones, but here and there one was fairly symmetrical and the children made the best of the other bits, planting them in the ground and heaping up little mounds. They had learned how to make folded paper into boxes, into which they put their paper dolls and buried them, digging them up afterwards. Jessie played this game placidly, but Isabel did not more than half enjoy it, because she felt that she was not playing fair. To play fair, she should have cut the paper dolls in two at the waist line, to let their souls out, for that was her theory of the manner of the soul's escape. "You," as she realized quite well, were just in the middle of your body, and to let You out your legs must come off. Her idea was that the legs disappeared entirely and were never seen again. She never mentioned this to Jessie or to anyone else, partly because children don't tell their inmost thoughts, partly because she was afraid that if the matter were once squarely brought up, they would have to play fair; and she could not bring herself to sacrifice her dolls. But she was very uncomfortable about it. She felt that she ought to give up playing cemetery, but couldn't make up her mind to that either. On the whole, her self-respect suffered.

She had been sitting on the lowest step one afternoon, making her little boxes, to be in readiness for Jessie's return. When she had used up all her paper she piled them up under the tree, where she had already laid the collection of marble chips; for they were going to begin fresh that day. She thought she would go up to the gar-

den and pick the little flowers that Grandma always let her have. There were some left still, although summer was really over. She climbed the shaky steps and ran up the slope and around to the flower garden on the other side of the house. As she did so, she saw a buggy at the door and Father standing on the steps talking to the doctor. Isabel knew the doctor well and liked him, in spite of his doses. If he had been alone she would have ran up to him, but she always kept out of the way of Father. She changed her mind about the flowers and thought she would go and ask Grandma if the doctor was coming in. She ran around to the back door and was hurrying to the sitting-room when Norah met her.

"Don't go in," said Norah, not unkindly, and stretched out a detaining hand. "Yer grandma's sick."

Isabel tried to pull herself away. "I can go in the *sitting-room*," she said in remonstrance.

"No, no!" Norah held on to her. "Yer grandma's in there."

"Then she isn't sick," said Isabel. "Sick people are in their bedroom."

"She couldn't be took to her bedroom," explained Norah. "She fell downstairs. They're makin' a bed in the sitting-room. I just brought down the things. Come in the kitchen an' be a good child an' I'll let ye make a little pie."

For a moment Isabel stood transfixed. *Grandma fall downstairs!* Only children fell downstairs. Overcome by horror she let herself be drawn into the kitchen. The Giffords's Bridget was there, in the rocking-chair. True to her promise, Norah hurriedly got out flour and other ingredients and prepared a bit of dough for the child, while Isabel stood looking on.

"They'll be wantin' me," she muttered, "but sure, 'tis herself wud want the child looked after."

"Will they be thinkin' it's a sthroke the old lady had?" asked Bridget, rocking luxuriously back and forth.

"Hush!" said Norah.

"A stroke?" thought Isabel. "What is that? and why

'hush'?" Before Norah could stop her she ran out of the kitchen, through the passage and into the sitting-room. There was a bed there, which was very strange. Mrs. Gifford, Jessie's mother, was standing by it and Father and the doctor had Grandma in their arms and were laying her on it. And Grandma groaned—a terrible sound. Her face was terrible, too. Isabel could not quite believe that it was Grandma at all. She turned and fled out of doors to the remotest part of the garden, where she threw herself, face down, on the grass and broke into wild sobs.

It was growing dark when Norah found time to look for her. She brought her in and gave her some supper in the bright, warm kitchen, and then put her to bed. Isabel sobbed again at the sight of Grandma's empty bed beside her little one. She cried herself to sleep and woke up later to see a light, and a woman getting into Grandma's bed. Her eyes were heavy and, forgetting the afternoon, she thought it was Grandma herself. Hours after that, however, she woke again—wide awake this time—and saw Norah with a candle. Norah was crying. She went to the bed and the woman in it sat up.

"The old lady's gone," said Norah.

At that, the woman in the bed got up and stood on the floor, and Isabel saw that it wasn't Grandma at all, but Miss Tully, a tall, thin woman whom she had often seen in church. But what was she doing here in Grandma's bed? Miss Tully dressed herself quickly—she did not seem to have been quite undressed—and, lighting another candle, left the room, followed by Norah.

It was appallingly strange. "Norah, Norah!" cried Isabel, but Norah was out of hearing. Isabel shivered with fear of the unknown and put her head under the bedclothes where she lay quaking until she finally fell asleep again.

In the morning Norah came and helped her to dress and gave her a good breakfast in the kitchen. After that, she told her that Grandma was dead.

"And gone to Heaven?" said Isabel.

Norah's heart overcame her theology and she said, "Yes, darlin', sure she's gone to Heaven."

Isabel, awestruck, did not weep at this announcement, and later, when her father sent for her, she was quite composed in manner. He was in his study, and Aunt Eliza was there too. How had Aunt Eliza got there? She always came and went on the cars and waved a handkerchief from the other hill, across the ravine. Isabel submitted dutifully to a kiss from her and then, to her surprise, her father lifted her on his knee and kissed her too.

"If you feel that you can give up your position and look after her,—” he was saying to Aunt Eliza.

And Aunt Eliza answered: "Of course, William. It is my duty to do it."

Father's face was white and he was looking very sorry. When he put his arm around her Isabel glanced, half fearfully, into his face and was conscious that he was different from the father she had known.

"You know that God has taken your grandmother?" he said to her.

"Yes, Father." She suddenly wanted to put her arm around his neck and kiss him, but did not dare, and began to cry, instead.

His arm relaxed its hold. "You will be very good and quiet," he said, kindly enough, "and not give any trouble."

She looked up at him wistfully. "Yes, sir," she said meekly, and slipped down from his knee.

She would have liked to stay in the kitchen with Norah, but there was so much company there. It seemed as if all the Irish servants of the village had come in, and they said things which—half understood as they were—deepened her sense of horror and mystery. She shrank from their caresses and wandered into the empty dining-room. Her father was shut up in his study and Aunt Eliza seemed to be very busy with the people who were coming and going in the parlor.

Later in the day Norah said to her: "Wouldn't ye like to see yer grandma now? It's beautiful she looks."

Isabel drew back, remembering how Grandma had looked when she saw her being lifted into bed.

"Come now, don't be afraid," urged Norah. "Ye'll be glad ye've seen her."

She took the child by the hand and led her to the darkened room. Pulling up the blind a little, she turned down the sheet which covered Grandma's face. Then she drew up Isabel's own little chair and made her stand on it. Isabel had been trembling and shivering, but the first sight of Grandma's face quieted her. This was the face she loved, and sweeter than she had ever seen it. Child as she was, she stood spellbound before that look of deep, ineffable peace. Grandma looked as if she had solved all mysteries and had at last obtained her heart's desire. The little child gazed on and on, fixing in her mind an image never to be effaced. But oh, if Grandma would only open her eyes! Isabel leaned over and gently kissed her cheek. Norah shivered and put an arm around her and Isabel turned and looked at her in wonder. Why shouldn't she kiss Grandma? Her cheek was cold, to be sure, but not colder than her own face often got, only—it had always been warm before—and soft.

Suddenly her eyes traveled down the white-covered figure and rested, fascinated, on the spot where the sheet stood up in a point, quite as if there were feet under it. Isabel put that aside for future questions. Then, after one more look at Grandma's face, she was lifted down from the chair, the sheet was replaced and the blind drawn again, and Norah led her from the room.

It was when Norah was putting her to bed that night that she put her question. "But what was it," she asked, "that looked like feet on Grandma—under the sheet?"

"Why, that *was* her feet, darlin'," said Norah, much puzzled at the question.

"All fastened on her?"

"Of course. What is the child thinkin' of?"

"But how"—it was difficult, but she *must* find out—"how did her soul get out of her?"

"Why, out of her mouth, sure," said Norah.

"Does it always get out that way?"

"Sure—always."

The idea was not pleasing, but in the midst of all that was so strange and dreadful came one consoling thought. She had played fair after all, and needn't have worried.

All that followed—the mysterious comings and goings in the darkened house, the funeral, with its droning sounds of praying and preaching and mournful hymns, even the visit, under Aunt Eliza's guidance, to see Grandma in her coffin, did not efface the impression of that first visit with Norah. Seated on Norah's lap at an upper window, she watched the funeral procession as it moved slowly away. Father, consulting what he knew would be his mother's wish, had mercifully ordained that she should not accompany it.

III

AT first Isabel forgot sometimes and came running into the house, calling for Grandma, and weeping when she did not find her, but in time she learned to remember, and to forget. When she needed comfort it was to Norah that she turned, for except during the daily lesson hour, Aunt Eliza was too busy to be troubled with her. Nor were the lessons inspiring, for her aunt, while a good teacher for older pupils, had no aptitude for small children. Moreover, Miss Stirling was taking her house-keeping cares very seriously indeed and had no time for foolishness. Isabel must keep herself clean and not tear her clothes, and she must not get in the way while the great household rites of washing and ironing, sweeping and dusting, preserving, pickling and baking, were being observed. There was no intermission between them, although they were interrupted by visits from ladies who belonged to Father's church. Aunt Eliza frowned severely on those ladies when they petted Isabel and said how pretty she was. She once overheard her aunt say something about Miss Lydia Baird "setting her cap," but she was quite sure that Miss Lydia didn't wear a cap. However, she was obliged to keep out of the way more than ever when the company came. Also, she must, even while keeping out of the way, be mindful of every rule laid down for her. "I forgot" was never accepted as an excuse.

Norah soon disappeared from the scene, being weighed and found wanting. Her affections were warm, but her kitchen closets were undeniably untidy. With her departure Isabel lost the last person with a lap to climb into. The day of caresses was over, for the stiff good-night kisses of her father and her aunt could hardly be con-

sidered in that light. Under this régime she developed an extraordinary aptitude for naughtiness. Her days were punctuated by punishments and she never had a clear conscience. She knew that she was naughty and sure to go to Hell if she died; and Death was waiting around the corner. It seemed as if nobody ever lost a chance of telling her how imminent it was, even for the smallest children. No criminal, dodging the law, lived a more exciting life than the minister's little daughter. She developed a morbid appetite for excitement and became a rebel against authority.

These excitements and an inordinate love of sweets frequently brought her to grief. Grandma had been moderately indulgent in the matter of goodies, but Aunt Eliza considered all sweet stuff bad for children. So Isabel grew sly and helped herself, sticking fingers into sugar-bowls and jam-pots, lying in wait for propitious moments of an unlocked storeroom and helping herself largely to fruit-cake, pound-cake, anything that came first. Hence, headaches; and odious doses; and dreadful dreams at night—dreams of a strange man who lurked in the room of Punishments next the study and, coming out suddenly upon people, seized them by the head and feet and broke them in two. He never caught *her*, but the floor used to be strewn with the fragments of the rest of the family, and she would awake bathed in perspiration from the mad exertion of running away from him. It was, on the whole, an unhappy life, in which the brightest spots were the hours spent in simple play with Jessie under the apple-tree. But Jessie had other companions nowadays and only came when she had nothing better to do.

Even better than Jessie, Isabel loved Jessie's mother. *She* had a lap, if you please, nice and soft and adapted to cuddling; and she was always ready to offer that refuge to the forlorn child. Her cheeks were soft too, and prettily pink and kissable, and her eyes smiled even when her mouth was serious. With her was happiness and cosy comfort. Jessie's father was nice too, in his quiz-zical way, and one wasn't much afraid of him. But Aunt

Eliza thought that little girls should stay at home. Isabel had stringent orders not to go through the little gate without permission, on pain of having it nailed up; and the path through the Giffords's back yard was only too visible from those quarters of the house where Aunt Eliza was apt to be busying herself, as well as from the study windows. So the times when Paradise was open were few and far between.

However, the front gate was down the hill on the other side and well out of sight, since the parsonage was on the summit of an eminence, with the ground sloping down on three sides. Isabel used to stand at that gate, peering through the pickets and waiting for she knew not what adventure, until one September day Adventure came to her. It came in the person of a small girl; an enchanting girl with a broad, jolly, freckled face and braids of mud-colored hair looped up in front of each ear and tied with pink ribbons. Isabel adored braids, which she thought far superior to curls.

"Hello!" said Isabel.

"Hello!" said the girl, smiling cheerfully.

Immediate friendship. The girl couldn't come in, however. Had to go home. Wouldn't Isabel come too? Isabel looked back at the house. No one in sight and the day stretched out limitless till supper-time.

"I'll bring you home again," said the girl.

Isabel opened the gate and went out. They ran down the street and turned a corner in a direction new to Isabel. They crossed a bridge and she was on the other side of the creek. Looking upstream she could see the mill on which she looked down from the sitting-room windows. She had always longed to get on the other side of that creek. They went up the hill a short distance and turned into a house standing directly on the street. The two-story verandah with the wooden pillars looked very grand to Isabel as they approached. She did not so much like the looks of the men sitting on the lower verandah, with their feet on the railing, but her new friend, whose name, by the way, was Cassie, hurried

her past them. A stuffy smell of cooking greeted them as they entered the house. A boy came tearing down the stairs with a great clatter of heavy shoes. He was larger than Cassie, but just as freckled and jolly.

"Where are you going, Dick?" said Cassie.

"To play ball," he answered, without stopping his headlong course.

Isabel looked after him. She had never seen such a boy and was glad that he had gone. They went on up the stairs and into a large, bright room, strewn about with playthings. Dolls were everywhere and a dolls' house in one corner; an enchanting room. Near the window, in the sun, lay an old cat, asleep, with two kittens frisking about her. Isabel sat down on the floor and gathered kittens and dolls in her lap.

Presently the door opened and a young woman came in. She was a pretty young woman, with a laughing mouth and serious eyes, and glossy brown hair, knotted loosely at the back of her neck. "Why, who is this?" she asked.

"Oh, here's Aunt Mary!" cried Cassie joyfully. "Aunt Mary will play with us. This is Isabel. She's come to see me."

Aunt Mary proved to be a capital playmate. "I wish you were *my* Aunt Mary," said Isabel.

This was when, after a delightful season of dolls' housekeeping, she was sitting on the young woman's lap, her head resting on the friendly shoulder.

"I wish I were. I'd spoil you well. But you haven't told me your other name, darling, and where you came from. You might have dropped right down from the sky."

"My name is Isabel Stirling. I live 'way off across the bridge and up the hill."

Aunt Mary's face changed. "Is your father the Reverend Mr. Stirling?"

"I don't know," said Isabel. "He—he preaches."

"And do they know where you are?" asked Aunt Mary, her face quite serious now.

"No. I—" shamefacedly—"I ran away. Perhaps I must go home now."

"Oh, can't she stay to tea?" cried Cassie.

"I'm afraid not," said Aunt Mary. "We'd like to have her, but they don't know where she is. Get her sunbonnet, Cassie. We'll go most of the way with you."

"I want to come again," said Isabel.

"And we want to have you. But you mustn't run away, you know."

Isabel hung her head. "Aunt Eliza don't let me go visiting."

They started out, down the stairs, through the hall and across the verandah, where the men still sat, smoking and spitting. As they came down the steps, a lady was passing. She looked around at them and then stood stock-still, gazing at the three. Isabel knew her at once. It was Miss Lydia Baird.

"What are you doing here, Isabel?" asked Miss Baird, in her honeyed accents.

Isabel did not answer.

"We are taking her home," said Aunt Mary.

"But how did she get here? What are you doing with her?" Miss Baird's tone was now severe and inquisitorial.

"She came in with my little niece and I am taking her home." Aunt Mary spoke with a greater dignity than Miss Baird's.

"Come with me, Isabel, and I will take you home." Miss Baird held out a hand.

"No," said Isabel, and did not budge.

"You *must* come with me, Isabel."

"No," repeated the child. "Aunt Mary will take me."

"Aunt Mary!" Miss Lydia Baird was more than scandalized. Since that naughty child would not go with her—what had those dreadful people done to bewitch her so?—the least she could do was to follow at a discreet distance to see that they really did take her home. She saw them leave her at the gate and then she went in her-

self and rang the doorbell. She did not ask for Aunt Eliza, whom she felt to be not altogether her friend, but inquired if Mr. Stirling would see her. Shown into his study, she sat down and turned a shocked, sympathetic face toward him.

"I think it my duty to tell you," she began, "that I met your dear little Isabel just now, coming out of Malden's tavern."

Had the woman gone crazy? Under the least aggravating circumstances the mention of Malden's tavern was to the Reverend William Stirling as a red rag to a bull—a drinking resort of which he had an even lower opinion than it deserved, and which he had vowed to extirpate. He had already crossed swords with its proprietor, but had got the worst of it. He did not love Peter Malden the better for his ability to prove that he had not violated the law. That his own child should be mentioned in the same breath with Malden, struck him as equally grotesque and insulting.

"I must ask you to explain yourself," he said stiffly.

Lydia didn't like his manner, but her tone became sweeter than ever as she replied: "I hardly thought you could know it. I had occasion to pass there—it's a shame that it is right in one's way going up South Street—and I saw little Isabel coming down the steps with a young woman and a little girl. She refused to come with me and clung to the woman, whom she called 'Aunt Mary.' She seemed very fond of her."

At first the minister felt merely the shock of astonishment. Then his anger mounted. "They must have enticed her away," he said. His eyes flamed. He clenched his hands and, rising from his chair, strode up and down the room in an effort to control himself. Miss Baird confided to a friend that she had never been so frightened in her life. "That man has a temper, my dear, and I expect that naughty child got what she deserved."

Having learned that the child had been brought home, he made short work of his visitor. "Yes, you did quite right," he said. "I am obliged to you for following them

and letting me know;" and then he bowed her out and shut his study door behind her.

Left alone, he struggled to obtain control of himself, and did not send for the child until he felt that his wrath had passed into the stage of righteous indignation. Nevertheless, it was the Day of Judgment for Isabel. She was terrified, but truthful. No, she had never been there before. She had not been carried away. She had just opened the gate and gone out because Cassie had asked her to go home with her. Yes, she knew it was naughty, but—"please, Father!"

"Please, Father," did not avail. Even the courage which the terrified child showed in telling the truth when, by his questions, her father had given her an opportunity to cast some of the blame elsewhere, made no impression. All that was taken as a matter of course. She was led to the empty room and treated with a severity which perhaps afforded some relief to the Reverend Mr. Stirling's overwrought feelings.

Later, when she had gone to bed, sobbing and supperless, Aunt Eliza said to her brother: "I suppose you blame me for letting her out of my sight, but what am I to do? I can't have my eyes on her *every* minute. She is like a piece of quicksilver. Really, William, you will have to send her to school to keep her out of mischief."

"I had thought you could teach her," said William. "She seems a child of bad impulses," he added bitterly.

"Oh, yes, I can teach her her lessons, as far as that goes," answered Eliza with some asperity. "But I can't do *everything*. Nobody could. Put her in the primary grade of the Academy. She will be looked after for five or six hours, and she'll learn all they teach her. She is bright enough. She and Jessie Gifford can go and come together."

William yielded and the great adventure of school began for Isabel.

IV

ISABEL skipped like a lamb beside Aunt Eliza on the Monday morning when she was on her way to make her first appearance as a pupil in the village Academy; but there was more than the unthinking joy of the skipping lamb in her ecstasy. She was to see Life; to have companions. In a worldful of children she had been alone, save for those hours with Jessie. Now she was to have children—and more children!

They passed through the girls' playground, a green, shady enclosure, and up the wooden steps into a shabby hallway. On the other side the Academy presented a brave front of red brick, with broad stone steps and a wide doorway, but that entrance was reserved for the boys—lords of creation—and opened on their playground, twice as large as that of the girls, but a bare place, where the ballplayers had left not a blade of grass alive. Little cared Isabel for shabbiness. Her heart beat high as she mounted the worn, slippery stairs, with her hand on the banister down which she was so often to slide recklessly. She turned shy when she entered the large, many-windowed room of the Primary Department and hung back a little, but her aunt drew her along. Miss Atkins, a pretty, fresh-faced country girl, new to her work of teaching, met Aunt Eliza with blushes and bade her good-bye with relief. Isabel she regarded with hopeful interest, beguiled by her beauty and by the shyness which masked an adventurous spirit. Jessie, seated at a desk, smiled demurely at her as she went past, led by the teacher to a seat by a deskmate who, by chance was also a Sunday-school classmate. She would have preferred Jessie, but Lily Brainard greeted her with a welcoming smile.

What happiness to be joint proprietor of one of those desks in the old Academy! Battered without, but spacious within, they held many treasures besides their legitimate contents. Lids they had, behind which much important business could be transacted if one were spry; and since each desk, with its two compartments, was meant for two pupils, two heads could meet in conclave behind the raised lid. The perfectly new pupil, however, is always a model of good behavior. It is joy enough, so far, to take account of fresh surroundings. On that first day Isabel used her eyes and kept her mouth closed. She had looked around immediately to see whether her friend Cassie might perhaps be there, but could not find her. Nor was Dick among the boys, seated at their desks on the opposite side of the room, beyond the recitation benches. He would have been too big for the Primary Department and, as a matter of fact, the brother and sister attended the Public School.

Boys were an unknown quantity to Isabel. To be sure, there was Edmund Gifford, Jessie's brother, who sometimes vouchsafed them a word or two, but he was much older—thirteen or fourteen. After a survey of those opposite desks she decided that she did not like boys. They trooped to the long benches nearest their side of the room for recitations, and she had a fresh access of shyness when she found herself brought out with the girls and seated on the corresponding bench on the girls' side. However, Miss Atkins praised her for reading so well, and praise was sweet to her, and new, not being included in Father's and Aunt Eliza's scheme of bringing up a child.

Recess came, and the small boys disappeared into the mysterious precincts of the boys' playground, while Isabel and the other little girls repaired to their own domain, a large enclosure of grass and big old trees. Just now the ground was strewn with the first red and yellow leaves of autumn. They were obliged to keep out of the way of the older girls and their games, but they had room enough. The new scholar was made welcome and re-

entered the schoolroom with arms entwined in those of two bosom friends.

Good behavior and a good conscience did not last long. True, there was legitimate excitement in spelling down the class and in the applause gained by prowess in mental arithmetic, but there was so much time left over! Isabel bent her energies to devise ingenious ways of filling those empty half-hours and under her efficient leadership the Primary Department was demoralized. Poor distracted Miss Atkins was sometimes fain to raise her own desk-lid and shed a few tears under its shelter. Sharp little eyes always found her out and an awestruck whisper would go around the room—"Miss Atkins is crying!" Then for perhaps an hour everybody would be preternaturally good. Once in a while, indeed, Isabel tried the experiment of being good for several days at a time. That in itself was an excitement. Everybody was so astonished and Miss Atkins was so pleased. But when people began to expect her to be quiet and well-behaved the interest was gone and she broke out afresh. The room was filled with whisperings and gigglings; little girls quarrelled more or less dramatically; little girls were late in coming in after recess; lessons were neglected.

Punishments were numerous; not the ferule, which Miss Atkins hated, but everything else which her ingenuity could devise. Isabel sat in corners, stayed in at recess, studied extra lessons, all with angelic cheerfulness. She was always willing to pay the price of her amusements so long as there was no humiliation in the punishment and if only she might not be found out at home. Meantime, Aunt Eliza thought that school was doing wonders for her; so easy it was to be demurely good at home when there was so much fun going on at school. Yet she knew she was naughty, and conscience was always ready to give her a bad quarter of an hour.

There was one dark winter day which she never forgot. She had a nagging headache and had been not only ill-behaved, but irritable. Lily Brainard, who greatly preferred to have things go smoothly and easily, had been

drawn into her misdoings and both little girls were kept after school. That was a punishment which always worried Isabel, lest a noticeable lateness in getting home should draw down inquiries which she could not parry. Then, she and Lily had promised each other not to cry, and Lily broke the compact and blubbered freely after she herself had kept a stiff upper lip when it would have been a real luxury to weep and repent. For Miss Atkins could, on occasion, talk in a way to melt a stone. When they came out of the schoolhouse it was already dusk. The snow lay thick on the ground, and all along beside the walk it showed where the other girls had lain down to make "impressions." But Isabel could not stop to play and, in fact, did not feel like it. She had lost one mitten and was cold and cross and uncomfortable.

"You cried!" she said fiercely, as they went down the walk to the gate. "I'll never speak to you again, Lily Brainard!"

"I don't care," wailed Lily. "I want to be good. I'm tired of being naughty!"

Isabel felt lonely and deserted. She, too, would have liked to be good, but had stood out on a point of honor. "You broke your word after you said 'hope to die,'" she said doggedly. "If you're going to be good you'd better learn not to tell lies."

At this, Lily burst into fresh tears and Isabel ran away and left her, a forlorn little figure, plodding along in the dusk. Isabel ran all the way home. Jessie had not waited for her this time. Jessie, in fact, was puzzled and disturbed by Isabel's behavior and, while always loving her, liked her less well at school than at home.

Isabel got safely in, by good fortune. Aunt Eliza was entertaining Miss Baird in the parlor and Father was out. She took off her things and sat down by the sitting-room fire. Her feelings were bruised and her conscience hurt her more than usual. Moreover, her head was aching rather badly. She was dreadfully afraid she would die before she was grown up. Once grown up, she would be safe, for all grown-up people were good and loved

God, even when they were people you didn't care for, like Miss Lydia. That is, of course, there were thieves and robbers, and the heathen, and the Jews who crucified Christ, but the kind of grown people she knew—the kind she would of course be—*they* all loved God. She herself didn't and couldn't, and she was about the naughtiest child that ever lived; that she knew very well. Every night she knelt down by her little bed and said her prayers, but her one heartfelt petition, the true cry of her soul, was—"O God, let me live to grow up!"

It was going to be horribly stupid to be grown up, but safe; and Isabel would stand before the mirror and smooth her curly hair down primly on each side of her face, as Aunt Eliza wore hers, and would sigh as she thought how hideous she was going to be. As to a possible change of fashion in the arrangement of grown-up hair, such an idea never entered her head. As Aunt Eliza wore her hair now, so she herself must wear hers in that distant, dull, but safe future. To-night she felt that she didn't care how dull it might be, or how she would look. She was very tired of the troubles of childhood. When Miss Baird finally left and the tea-bell rang, she went into the dining-room and tried to eat her supper, but had no appetite. Afterward she did her half-hour's task of knitting, and then Aunt Eliza lighted her little pewter lamp and told her it was bedtime.

Isabel had her own room now, for Aunt Eliza liked hers to herself. Also, she considered the child quite old enough to go to bed by herself. When Isabel took her little lamp and, leaving the light and warmth of the sitting-room, went upstairs alone, she went into a world of mystery and dread. It never occurred to her to ask Aunt Eliza to go with her, as Grandma had always done, and she would not for the world have told her fears. To-night the ascent of the stairs seemed more formidable than ever. She went up slowly, guarding her light from drafts; for as between the fear lest Something should catch her feet from below, and the danger of extinguish-

ing her lamp if she should run, she chose the former alternative. Darkness was worse than anything.

Once safely in her room, she set down the lamp with a sigh of relief, but was at once confronted with a new danger. For in the tiny closet of her room, a closet to which she went in the daylight without a tremor, lived, after dark, a skeleton. She had never yet seen him, but ever since the time when she had heard Aunt Eliza speak of the "skeleton in the closet," she had known that *this* was the closet. In some mysterious way the skeleton had imposed certain terms on her. As long as she could succeed in preventing the tiniest bit of her skin from being visible—except, of course, her hands and face—so long the skeleton would refrain from molesting her; but once expose an atom of arm or leg or foot, then it would jump out of the closet and leap upon her.

Under these circumstances, undressing was attended with difficulties. First of all, she said her prayers. There was always a quaking feeling of something behind her, but to-night, when her conscience was so unusually tormenting, her terror was almost unbearable. There seemed to be no refuge from an avenging God in front of her and a ravenous Devil behind her. She omitted no part of the prayers she had been taught, but what a relief it was to get up from her knees and look around the room. Then, however, her nightgown had to be put on before the other clothes were taken off. Stockings and shoes were removed under the shelter of a petticoat thrown over her feet, which were quickly drawn into bed. Then came the horrible moment of blowing out the light. The bedclothes were held up in both hands, in readiness for a plunge, then a puff of breath, darkness, and the curly head and the wildly beating heart were down, down, hidden under a smothering weight of blankets.

V

IN the intervals of school adventures Isabel learned to write, and began the study of a fascinating fat book in a black cover—Peter Parley's Universal History. At home she learned to make her own bed, and had an irksome nightly task of sewing. On Saturdays and Sundays she would sit long at a window looking toward the south and wonder what she would find if she could ever get to the top of the opposite hill and look over. The railway train that came and went twice a day along that hill, zigzagging its way up or down, fascinated her and she longed to be a passenger on it. Very often, when Father was out of the house and Aunt Eliza safely busy downstairs, she would steal up to Father's bedroom and look at the portrait of her mother. It was a small portrait, well painted, of a lovely girl with golden brown hair and deep blue eyes. Those eyes met Isabel's and held them, until it seemed to her as if her mother really must be looking through them. Yet the thought did not alarm her—comforted her, rather. Any slight noise downstairs would make her hurry guiltily away with a palpitating heart.

Time moves slowly when it is all before one. It was all very well to get to be eight years old, but the grown people were less impressed than one had expected, and it now seemed to Isabel as if she never would be nine. However, the intervening winter wore away, like its predecessors, and with the long, bright days of early summer one became more contented. In those days the children brought flowers for the teacher's desk, lilacs and the little early roses. The strange, red-brown blossoms of "shrub" were crushed in warm little hands to bring out the odor, and bunches of pansies were pinned on little

frocks. With the daily offering of flowers there was a better relation between pupils and teacher; with the open windows there was better air to breathe. For the moment, peace brooded over the Primary Department.

Over on the boys' side of the room sat Richard; and if you were a little girl who didn't like boys, he was just the boy you *would* like, so gentle was he, and so clean. A mother's darling, evidently, was little Richard, with his fair, curly hair, his pale blue eyes and his immaculate clothes. Very fresh and dainty he looked when he came in of a morning, with his wide white dimity collar tied with a cord and tassels and the corner of a clean handkerchief sticking out of his side-pocket. Nor was he entirely dependent on his clothes for distinction. The other boys may have dubbed him "girl-boy," but not one of them could approach his precocious gift of declamation. It was one of the school treats to hear him recite "The boy stood on the burning deck" and other time-worn favorites.

Richard had always cast friendly looks across the room at Isabel and lately she had returned his glances so kindly that one rainy day when the children had to stay in the house at recess he ventured to approach her as she sat on one of the recitation benches, cutting out strings of paper dolls with her little scissors. He sat down beside her and offered her a transparent slate with a picture fastened underneath and a pencil hanging by a string. Isabel drew the picture on the slate, Richard sitting by her side, and then offered to give him back the slate.

"It is for you to keep," said he, blushing.

"Will your mother let you?" asked Isabel.

"My mother don't care," he replied.

"Thank you," said Isabel politely, and put it in her desk among her treasures.

As soon as school had begun again a little note was passed to her. It was short and to the point.—"Dear Isabel. Richard is your beau. Emily." Isabel blushed furiously and scorned to reply.

Every day after that, Richard used to bring some

offering; frequently one of his cherished toys, at other times a nosegay, or a cluster of cherries, their stems fastened together with a blade of grass. Isabel smiled her thanks across the room when she found them on her desk, but there were whole days when they did not exchange a word; only when he was called upon to recite his "pieces" she would sit up very straight and pink-cheeked, feeling a just pride in the performance.

The affair was a godsend to the writers of notes, who were apt to be hard put to it for something to say; and whatever was done or left undone, the notes must be written. Each desk held a store of small stationery. If you were lucky in the matter of spending-money, you bought it; pale pink or blue paper, the tops of the sheets and the flaps of the envelopes decorated with some device of flowers; otherwise you made it out of white paper, with homemade paste to fasten the envelopes in place; and that child was poor indeed who had not a box of fanciful seals ready to affix. Isabel made her own stationery, but in compensation she possessed a portfolio which was the pride of her heart and the envy of the other girls. It had been given her by one of the ladies who came so often to see her Father. Every morning she smuggled it out of the house (being well aware that Aunt Eliza would forbid her taking it to school) and smuggled it in again when she went home in the afternoon. Her correspondence now became very voluminous. Not only Emily, but Helen and Katie and even quiet Jessie had their say about her beau, while Lily nudged and whispered her comments. In fact, Lily, more than any of the others, was interested, for she had begun, some time ago, to cast sidelong glances across the room and most of the notes which she wrote were slipped slyly into some little boy's hand. Owing to this preoccupation, she had lost interest in mischief and was so demure that Miss Atkins was relying on her to have a good influence on her seatmate.

Isabel found this new excitement an agreeable experience until the fatal Friday afternoon when Richard spoke

his piece in the General Meeting-Room. Ordinarily the Primary children were not expected to take part in these weekly performances, which were of a more or less festive character, but sat meekly on the front seats, the little girls' white-stockinged legs hanging down in full view of the assembled school. Isabel, pulling down her frock in a more or less futile attempt to hide the holes which usually appeared by that time of day, thought it would be much better to make the big girls, with their long dresses, sit in front. They however, clung to their privileges and were ranged against the wall on the raised seats. The boys and girls' seats were separated by the platform on one side of the room and the Principal's pulpit on the opposite side.

To the small children these seemed stately functions, with the declamations and "compositions," interlarded with solos and duets on the jingling old piano, and it was a red-letter day for the Primary Department when Richard, whose fame had reached higher quarters, was chosen to speak a piece on that stage. To Isabel it promised to be a proud occasion. When the little boy, dressed in his best, with a particularly broad and white collar, mounted the steps and made his bows to right and left she was palpitating with happy excitement; but when Lily on one side and Emily on the other, nudged her in the most open manner, pride began to give way to painful embarrassment.

"The boy stood on the burning deck," began Richard in his high, childish voice. To the older people he looked a mere baby as he stood there, but to the children of the Primary he was Isabel's beau. Other little girls leaned forward and smiled at her across their neighbors. Even the older girls, as it seemed to her, began to take notice, and Miss Atkins certainly smiled. It seemed to Isabel that the whole room was looking at her. She was all one blaze of agonized shame—and nowhere to hide her face! Nothing to do but sit with flaming face and downcast eyes and helpless, dangling legs, until the terrible ordeal was over and Richard stepped down from the platform

amid enthusiastic applause. Never, she felt, could she speak to him again. She hated him!

As soon as the school was dismissed she ran frantically through the crowd, upstairs to the schoolroom, threw on her hat, seized her treasured portfolio and flew down the stairs. At the outside door she met Richard, looking for sympathy. He had hurried, too, and feeling his dignity as a man (for had he not won his laurels in fair competition with other men?) he intended to walk home with her. Hitherto he had never gone farther than the corner. She would not look at him. Lily and the other girls rushed after her, trying to detain her, but she broke away from them fiercely and ran. Through the gate she flew, and up the street. Richard ran after her. So did Lily.

"You've dropped something!" screamed Lily.

Isabel became aware that her portfolio was shedding its contents. She didn't know what she had lost. She didn't care. She ran as she had never run before in her life. After a while the pursuing cries and footsteps died into silence. She went home alone, slunk into the back door and put her portfolio away. She never carried it to school again, nor did she ever speak to Richard. In after years she could not remember that she even saw him again. Someone told her that he and his mother went away to live. Perhaps they went at once. Possibly, indeed, Richard never came back to the Academy after that Friday afternoon. Her last recollection of him was as he looked when she turned her head—running after her, holding something out to her, calling her name.

VI

TEN years old and advanced to the big girls' room in the Academy and the dignity of the next-to-the-back seats in the General Meeting-Room—the girls in their teens still held those against the wall. Very proud now, and fairly well-behaved, though with none too much attention to spare for one's studies. For notes took up so much time; notes and Secrets, and a cipher to make the secrets still more mysterious. There were no very rigid examinations at that time, and no reports sent home to parents to betray one's shortcomings. Isabel gave scant attention to her lessons, but she invented a beautiful cipher, which she wrote with perfect ease and even read successfully. Of course, with all this important correspondence, there must be post-offices; in stone walls, in trees, in the ground itself, with a square of turf neatly lifted and replaced, and a little box fitted in below.

Perhaps the best of her post-offices was the one under the old steps at the bottom of the garden by the little gate, and the best of the secrets the one which she shared with Jessie. The time was long past when Isabel awaited Jessie's pleasure. She was now the leader and Jessie, although the elder, frankly yielded her the first place. It was under Isabel's direction that the two corresponded voluminously, under the names of Dora Dalrymple and Beatrice Deloraine, and invented the most surprising adventures, first at the boarding school which they attended in imagination, and then as young ladies launched in society. For by this time they were reading romances whenever they could get hold of them. Jessie had found barrels in the attic stuffed with old magazines and novels which she brought out one by one through the little gate.

They contrived a special hiding-place for them under the steps. Isabel was thus able to vary the mental diet of Hannah More's Repository Tracts, Charlotte Elizabeth's works and the memoirs of saintly children with old numbers of Littell's Living Age and Harper's New Monthly Magazine. Other girls lent books from time to time. The whole school wept over "The Heir of Redclyffe" and "The Wide, Wide World"; and even the Sunday-school Library frequently supplied a romance, religious in its tone, but thrilling in its adventures. Naturally, Dora and Beatrice were modeled on the various heroines.

With volumes to write, one couldn't be bothered with a cipher, and the two children did not trouble themselves about the chance of discovery. For her part, Isabel destroyed all the letters she received, but one day Jessie burst upon her with the announcement:

"Edmund found some of our letters and read them!"

"He hadn't any business to. It was *mean*!" Isabel flamed with rage. "Did he come here?"

"No, I left them around," confessed Jessie. "But Isabel, he says——"

"There's no fun in it any more," interrupted Isabel gloomily.

"But he says," persisted Jessie—"he says, why don't I write him as interesting letters as these? He says they are a great deal better than the ones I do write." Edmund was a collegian now, at home for his vacation. "You see," went on Jessie, "he got hold of one of mine that I had just written and several of yours, and he says yours are a great deal the best. Of course I knew that."

Isabel turned away with an impatient shake of her shoulders. She was pleased, but would not admit it. "I'm tired of that old secret anyway," she said.

"Oh, Isabel!" cried Jessie, in dismay. "It's the most *beautiful* secret."

But Isabel would not relent. It was sweet to be praised, but a secret discovered has lost its savor. Dora and Beatrice had had their day. Perhaps they might have had successors had not the Revival occurred just then.

With its coming the notes assumed a religious character. Little girls wrote them during school hours as freely as ever, in defiance of the rules; but how could one consider rules when one was expatiating on one's religious emotions and asking whether one's friends had experienced the like! There were some exceptions to the general excitement. Jessie, calm and sweet as ever, felt no need of a stimulant for religious emotions; and the Episcopal girls were out of it and went their way quietly, perhaps missing the secrets, in which they had been as enthusiastic as the rest. But there were not many of them in the Academy. Most of them attended Miss Gray's private school; and the Episcopal church was small in the village of Ptolemy.

Father and the other ministers had been trying to have a Revival ever since the latter part of the winter, but all the preaching and the extra prayer meetings did not, for a long time, seem to accomplish much. Then in the spring came the comet, with its fiery tail, which many people thought would set the world on fire, and at the same time there were prophecies of a "cholera summer." Father did not trouble himself about the comet, but concerning the cholera he had more to say, warning his people, in church and Sunday-school, that before the leaves turned red in the fall, death would claim many of them.

Some of the children, intent on their own affairs, did not even hear the awful warning; some were too dull to be much affected, but some were badly frightened, and of these last was Isabel. Death again assumed the prominence in her thoughts which it had lately lost amid the varied interests of her school life. Again she went to bed night after night with a bad headache and had terrifying dreams. Meantime, the Revival was actually beginning. Prayer meetings were held, morning, noon and night, in the various churches. The excitement penetrated to the schoolroom, with the result of the aforesaid notes. Father, who thought that it was high time for Isabel to take religion seriously—how seriously she did take it, he little knew—would have had her accompany Aunt Eliza

to the evening as well as the early morning prayer meetings, but the child was so pale and languid that the doctor had been called in by her aunt, and his emphatic command was that she should go to bed early and be kept as far as possible from undue excitement. Her nervous temperament, he said, was highly strung and would not bear tampering with.

But when Lily came to school one morning and said: "You just ought to have been at prayer meeting last night. It was perfectly lovely. I cried three handkerchiefs sopping wet," Isabel, who had been disappointed at finding the morning meetings lacking in thrill, felt that she could not stay away from anything so exciting as these evening services.

In spite of the doctor, her request to be allowed to attend the meeting that evening met with an instant consent. She had had the wit to make it in her father's presence. Aunt Eliza might have thought it necessary to obey the doctor, but to the minister the soul was of more moment than the perishing body. He would do his duty by the child, with whose physical condition, when all was said, he never greatly concerned himself. But to the child the experience was disappointing. She did not cry at all—did not have the slightest impulse to do so; and the uncouthness of some of the worthy brethren repelled her fastidiousness just as much in the evening as in the morning. This coldness of hers made her heart very heavy. She feared more than ever that she was not one of the Elect; for she had been instructed in the Presbyterian doctrine, having had to recite the Shorter Catechism to Aunt Eliza of a Sunday afternoon. To be sure, emotions and handkerchiefs cried sopping wet were quite useless if you were predestined to go to Hell anyway, but she would have welcomed the emotions partly on their own account and partly as a possible sign that she was one of the Chosen. For hadn't Father preached a sermon showing how they might know when they were, as the Catechism said, "effectually called"? She cried into her pillow that night and her sleep was haunted by visions of the ceme-

tery on the hill, with its white tombstones. The skeleton had by this time disappeared from the closet, but terrors equally hard to bear had succeeded him.

It was only the next day that Lily said to her: "There's an Inquiry meeting after school at the Methodist church. Let's go."

"What is an Inquiry meeting?" asked Isabel.

"I don't know," replied Lily, "but let's go anyway."

Discipline was relaxed in those days and Aunt Eliza was not always on the watch to see that she came home on the minute, so she consented. Emily was drawn in and the three ran across the Park—as Ptolemy called its village green—to the Methodist church.

"It's in the Sunday-school room," said Lily, so they went down some steps to the basement door. Once inside, they would have been glad to slink out again, for the only occupant of the room was the minister. He sat there, waiting for Inquirers, and looked up in some surprise as the three children entered. However, it was not altogether outside of his experience that babes should seek salvation.

"Have you come to see me?" he asked, turning kind eyes on them.

Isabel and Emily pushed Lily forward. As the leader of the expedition, she was expected to be its spokesman.

"We've come to the meeting," quavered Lily, turning dove's eyes on him.

"Will you come and take these seats?" said the minister, indicating three chairs in front of him.

He was a young man with an uncultivated voice, a shaven upper lip and a beard on his chin. He was new to the place and unacquainted as yet, outside of his own flock and the little band of ministers. A plain man of the people, taking his calling with serious enthusiasm, there was nevertheless a half-subdued gleam of humor in his eyes, and in his presence something sympathetic and attractive. With him, religion was not an awful and remote affair, but something which one could speak of with affectionate familiarity.

"Well now," he said, with a smile, "what can I do for you?"

"We have come to the meeting," repeated Lily.

"Well, this *is* the meeting."

"Oh!" said Lily, and her two companions squirmed uneasily.

"I don't believe you quite understand about it," he continued. "I am here to meet those who are anxious to learn to know our Lord, and to help them if I can. Now, perhaps I can help you children a little."

Much embarrassment on the three chairs. Lily seemed to have nothing more to say. Emily was equally silent. Isabel felt that good manners required some reply. She longed to run away, but instead, she replied politely:

"We'd be very much obliged."

Then, a look into his eyes gave her a startling sense of sympathy and understanding. Grown people did not usually look at her like that. She straightened up in her chair.

"How can you be converted if you want to and can't?" she asked in quite a different tone.

The young man gazed at her thoughtfully for a moment before he answered. "Don't you think you are thinking too much about the word 'conversion'?" he said at last. "If you love God—as I'm sure you must—all the rest comes naturally."

"But that's just it," said Isabel. "But what if you don't love Him? And how can you, if you don't? Doesn't it mean that you're not one of the Elect and nothing's of any use?"

"My dear child!" exclaimed the minister.

But Isabel went on. For the first time in her life she was speaking out her inmost thoughts. Lily and Emily, staring in astonishment, were forgotten, and she was alone with the man who seemed to draw out the secrets of her soul.

"When I was little," she said, "I thought that all grown people loved God and that if I could only live to grow up I'd be saved, but now, of course, I know better. I

don't love Him now and perhaps I sha'n't when I am grown up."

The minister gazed compassionately at the distressed childish face. "You are too young to understand these things," he said. "They hide God from you. Just think of Him as your Father. Don't be afraid of Him. You have a father, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Isabel.

"And a mother?"

She shook her head.

"Then you must love your father all the more," he said gently.

"Fathers—" began Isabel, and stopped.

"Well?" said the minister encouragingly.

"Fathers—" she began again. The tears were coming now and she struggled against them.

The minister waited, puzzled, but sympathetic.

"That doesn't help!" she burst out desperately. "You're afraid of fathers!"

In vain the minister talked. Isabel cried—all three little girls cried; the other two with a pleasant sense of excitement and the luxury of feelings gently stirred, but Isabel with an agonized, though inarticulate protest against the world and its Maker. When the minister finally dismissed them he had the curiosity to ask the name of this unusual child.

"Isabel Stirling," she replied from behind the handkerchief with which she was wiping away a few last tears.

"Her father is the Presbyterian minister," volunteered Emily officiously.

The young minister gazed thoughtfully after the children as they filed out of the room. "My reverend brother doesn't know how to bring up a child," he said to himself, and added pitifully—"Poor little soul!"

VII

AT eleven years old one is no longer quite so indifferent to the affairs of the grown-ups. One regards with a more judicial discrimination the various persons who come to the house. One notices, for instance, that Miss Lydia Baird is sickeningly sweet in her manner to Father; and one has learned what Aunt Eliza meant when she talked about setting a cap.

One has grown a trifle less afraid of Father—just a trifle, but enough to pluck up courage to say: "Father, why is dancing wicked?"

Father frowns. He always has a great deal to say about the wickedness of dancing, but to Isabel, sitting drearily on a bench in the General Meeting-Room at recess and watching the other girls as they spin around the room to the music of the old piano, it seems an amusement as harmless as it is enchanting. Only she doesn't know how; and no one offers to teach her because they all know how Father preaches against dancing. It is autumn now and the Revival is long past; and Father is displeased because it turned out that after all no results followed Isabel's request to be allowed to attend the evening meetings.

As to the dancing, he could not enter into an exposition of his reasons for condemning it, the chief of them being unfit for a child to hear. In conversation with adults he called a spade a spade and told them without circumlocution that he considered it destructive to purity of mind. To the Reverend William Stirling there were, to be sure, two sides to every question: his side, which was the Lord's side, and the other side, which was the Devil's. He told Isabel briefly that dancing was of the Devil and that she must take his word for it.

"But I don't see——" she began.

"You don't need to see. You are a child and must accept the wisdom of those older than yourself. I want you to promise me now that you will never dance as long as you live."

Isabel found the courage to argue. "I don't see why it's wicked for the girls at school to dance than to play tag."

But that, Father told her, was the way Satan began. He sternly required the promise of her and she, under the stress of circumstance, gave it; to her lasting regret. For she had a sense of honor which forbade her breaking her word. Yet it had its uses; not, it is true, such as her father imagined. It prevented her from ever binding herself to him again and gave her courage to resist certain demands of his in later years.

Time still passed slowly. Isabel was now growing rapidly. Aunt Eliza couldn't let her dresses down fast enough, and her hands and feet seemed several sizes too large for her. As the days grew darker and colder she was often ailing. The headaches, which were more frequent than ever, served her one good turn, for the doctor, asking how she spent her time, forbade the hateful daily task of sewing which Aunt Eliza's sense of duty imposed on her. She was to be kept out of doors when the weather permitted, said the doctor, and was to be allowed all possible diversion. So it happened that she spent more time at the Giffords's than had ever before been permitted. Mrs. Gifford made her feel that she was a child of the house, and knew just when to cosset her and when to let her alone. She took many a nap, tucked up on the big sofa in the cheerful sitting-room, waking to see Mrs. Gifford sitting against the light with her sewing, or Jessie, returned from school, in the low chair by the fire. It was there that she confided to Jessie her apprehensions with regard to Miss Baird.

"People do talk," admitted Jessie. Then she giggled. "Father says it's been a suit of durance, whatever that may be, but that Lydia is going to win out. They didn't think I heard."

"She comes all the time," said Isabel gloomily. "It's 'my sweet little Isabel,' and 'oh, Miss Eliza, what a beautiful housekeeper you are,' every other minute."

"In that molasses voice," interpolated Jessie.

"Molasses and vinegar."

"Like the stuff they give us when we have colds——"

"And the way she looks at Father—and asks his advice about every little thing! Father doesn't know about *little* things anyway."

"Do you suppose it really will happen?" asked Jessie, in a tone which was almost awestruck.

"Oh, I don't know. How *can* it? Jessie!"

"Yes?"

"I wouldn't mind having a stepmother if she was the right kind. It might be—almost—like having a mother. But oh, Miss Lydia!"

But it very soon became evident that it was going to be no other. Miss Lydia told each of her acquaintances separately, saying that they were not going to make any public announcement of it just yet; and she carried her embroidery with her whenever she went to spend an hour with a friend. William Stirling, as in duty bound, mentioned the matter to his sister. Eliza's disapproval of his choice was scarcely veiled.

"It's quite right for you to be married," she said. "I've always wondered how you've happened to wait so long. And of course you must suit yourself—though it doesn't always seem to be the case that a man does dispose of himself. I hope you'll be happy."

William tried to tell her something of his appreciation of her services to him. She was pleased, but cut him short. "Of course I was bound to do what I could," she said. "As the wedding is to be in June I'll go away for a vacation for the summer and get a place to teach in the fall. No—thank you for saying that I needn't be in a hurry, but that will be best. And you know I do prefer teaching to housekeeping."

All of which was quite in line with Lydia's plans. Dear Eliza was so independent. She thought independence

such a noble thing, so much finer than to be a clinging creature like herself. All *she* could do in life was just to try to make the people around her a little happier.

Meantime, Eliza made her arrangements. She was really a good teacher of a certain type, not sympathetic, but efficient in the matter of mathematics. Luckily, her successor in Miss Pryor's school was going to be married in the summer and she was able to get back her old place. It would be like going home. Except that she hated to see William made a fool of, and was a little concerned as to how Lydia and Isabel would get on, she was unfeignedly glad to give up the duties which she had discharged so conscientiously and taken so seriously.

But all this time, no one told Isabel of the changes in store. Aunt Eliza considered that to be Father's affair, and Father, who found himself suffering from a certain shamefacedness when it came to speaking to his child of his approaching marriage, thought that there was time enough and put it off; for even the godly parson who is ready to go to the stake for a Cause, will defer the small duty which he finds embarrassing. Of course, by this time Isabel knew all about it, but had her own idea of what was due to her.

"Don't you suppose anyone will *ever* tell me?" she said to Jessie. "Do you suppose she'll just come, and that will be all?"

The winter slipped away, Miss Lydia finished her embroidery and was closeted with her dressmaker, who spent weeks in an upper room of the house of the sister with whom Lydia lived. Aunt Eliza was putting the parsonage through a radical process of cleaning and renovating, beginning with the attic, which was thoroughly overhauled. Some of its contents were destroyed, some were given away, and some packed up to accompany Eliza in her flitting. The slender residue was stored away again under the eaves. One day she called Isabel up there and, showing her an old trunk, gave her a key.

"There are some things of your mother's," she said.

"They belong to you. You had better keep the trunk locked. One never knows."

Isabel accepted the key with awed excitement and put it away in a corner of her top bureau drawer. She had no wish to open the trunk just then. She was still more excited when, on coming in one day she found her mother's portrait hanging on the wall of her bedroom. She flew to her aunt.

"The portrait!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "Am I to have the portrait?"

"Yes," said Aunt Eliza. "I spoke to your father and he consented. It is much more suitable."

For the first time in her life, Isabel flung her arms about her aunt's neck. "Oh!" she cried. "Thank you!" She rushed away without waiting for an answer, leaving Aunt Eliza with a strange and painful softening of the heart. She found herself wishing that she did not have to leave the child.

Isabel had one pang of jealous pain that Father should be willing to part with the portrait, but that was obliterated by her joy at having it for her own, to live with. She worshiped it, standing before it for long moments, even kneeling before it when she said her prayers. Now when all these preparations were being made for the new wife, the house seemed permeated for Isabel with the presence of the young mother who had never lived there. For William Stirling's married life had been in another town, the place of his first pastorate, before he had been called back to his native place.

In all this putting in order there was, it seemed, one task for him. One day in March he packed a valise. Isabel overheard Aunt Eliza say to him:

"You think it is best—now?"

"I promised," he replied. "I should have done it long ago, but——"

"I know," replied his sister. "Those things are hard."

He went away, and no one told Isabel where he was going. She, occupied with the portrait, did not concern herself about the matter. Within two days he was back

again. Isabel had been told by her aunt to go and have tea with Jessie, but for once, came back sooner than she was expected. She dismissed at the gate the maid who had been sent to escort her home and hurried up to the house in the dark.

There was a wagon in the driveway and the front door stood wide open. The light from the hall streamed out, showing Father standing there, superintending the lifting of a long wooden box from the wagon. Isabel noticed that he had no hat on, though he was holding it in his hand and the air was raw. He was directing the men to handle the box carefully.

"Why, what—" began Isabel.

He turned at her voice. "Go into the house!" he ordered, not angrily, but imperatively.

She went in at once. Aunt Eliza was standing in the sitting-room and her face wore a strangely grave expression, quite different from her usual look of worry or preoccupation.

"Aunt Eliza, what has come?" Isabel was bursting with curiosity. "Father is out there and it is a long box, on a wagon."

"Don't ask questions, Isabel," said her aunt. In her voice as well as in her face there was that unusual solemnity, almost, Isabel thought, as though she were in church.

It was oppressive, all this solemnity. What in the world could be the matter? She ran upstairs and watched from the upper hall, hanging over the banister, unseen by those below. The men carried the box into Father's study, but they didn't stop there. She could hear their heavy footsteps as they went on into the room adjoining; that room of distressful associations. There they put their burden down, and when they had come out she heard Father shut the door of the other room and lock it. The lock did not work easily.

Of course, it was useless to ask questions, but a child with eyes and ears sharpened by curiosity can find out much without need of questions. Before she went to bed

that night the mystery was solved for Isabel. Did the men let fall a remark to Ann, the cook, on their way out? Did Father and Aunt Eliza exchange a few words when they thought she could not hear? She never remembered how it was that she found out, but she was certain. Her mother's body was in the house. In those days there was no such thing as a mortuary chapel in Ptolemy.

The awe which held her soul at first was soon swallowed up in horror. The children of those days did not lack realistic descriptions of the ravages of death. The more she tried not to think of it, the more the horror grew. She went to her room before her usual bedtime and there, her mother's eyes, looking at her out of the portrait, comforted her a little; but when she had got into bed she put her head under the blankets. . . .

It was impossible to go to sleep. Finally she heard Aunt Eliza come upstairs and then, after what seemed a long time, Father came up and shut himself in his room.

It had not occurred to her that Father would come up at all that night. She could remember that when Grandma died some of their friends came and stayed downstairs every night until the funeral; and she knew it to be the custom. Poor Mother! Here in the house with them all and everybody going to bed as usual. The ghastly visions gave place to a passion of love and pity, mingled with jealous indignation at Father's heartlessness. She threw off the blankets and sat up in bed. Since she was the only one to care. . . .

She waited until she heard Aunt Eliza's deep breathing. As for Father, she felt safe as long as his door was shut. Feeling for the matches and lighting the candle, she slipped on her little dressing gown and, barefooted lest she make a noise, started down the stairs. Which step was it that always creaked? One must go carefully there. Softly she went, and reached the bottom without mishap. Then to the study, where she closed the door behind her and set her candle on the table. "*I will not be afraid!*" she said to herself, but she was trembling and shivering.

She stood in the middle of the floor, her face turned toward the door of the other room. She was glad the door was locked and that the key had been taken out. She had come as far as she could. Did Mother know that she was there? She sat down in the easy chair, drawing up her feet and trying to cover them with her dressing gown. Then, quite suddenly, she burst into tears. She struggled with her sobs, lest someone should hear her. She got up and walked up and down the room until she was able to control herself; but then a fresh paroxysm seized her and she threw herself full-length on the floor. After a while her sobs ceased. Sighing and moaning, she fell asleep.

She awoke just as day was breaking. There was a moment of confusion and then she remembered. She was ashamed and conscience-stricken at having slept at her post, and frightened lest someone should be up early and find her there. It seemed to her that nobody could ever be so cold as she was, and she ached from head to foot. Shivering, she made her way upstairs and got into bed.

In the morning Father went to the cemetery with the long box, but Isabel was too ill to know anything about it. For many days she knew little of what went on around her. That deadly chill was followed by consuming fever and racking pain and wild fancies. The doctor was there, very kind and cheerful, but when he got out of the room he was serious enough and talked to Aunt Eliza about pneumonia and a nervous shock. Aunt Eliza seemed to be with her nearly all the time, and there was a nice, cheerful old woman called Sally. Isabel liked Sally and would cling to her hand when the pain and terror were worst. But when Father stood by the bed and looked at her she cried and drew herself away from him and called, "Mother! Mother!" So that the doctor forbade him the room. They had been boys together and John Brenton was not afraid of the minister.

"What you have been doing to the child, I don't know," he said. "But she's afraid of you and you've got to keep away."

So William Stirling went to his study and prayed solemnly for Isabel's immortal soul, that it might not go down to Hell. And Miss Lydia came and inquired for "the dear little sufferer" and brought what comfort she could to her William. And so the weeks passed, until in the sunny days of April a very thin and pale Isabel was wrapped up and taken out for a few moments at a time, to hear the robins sing and to see the yellow crocuses in bloom along the edge of the flower-beds, just inside the box borders.

VIII

"AND what," asked Miss Lydia, "does our dear little Isabel think of the prospect of having a new mother?"

Lydia and the Reverend Mr. Stirling were sitting side by side on the sofa in Mrs. Marvin's front parlor. On the Rev. William's evenings the Marvin family gave that room up to courtship and sat in the back parlor with the folding doors closed between; an arrangement which was irksome to the girls when they happened to have beaux of their own. But behind his newspaper their father muttered, "It's worth it," and his wife pretended not to hear him. Lydia and Mrs. Marvin, although sisters, were unlike.

Because we have seen William Stirling only as parson and parent—sternly conscientious in both capacities—it must not be supposed that there was no other side to his nature. He had never ceased to feel a resentful grief at the loss of his young wife; and had always carried himself rigidly, partly for that reason, partly from a strong sense of personal and professional dignity and a fear of gossip, besides being, in truth, greatly engrossed in his perpetual conflict with the world, the flesh and the devil. But adulation has its effect on all men and, when the odor of incense is perpetual, the most fastidious taste is likely to become vitiated. When, after withstanding a long siege, William Stirling finally capitulated, the completeness of his surrender was astonishing to himself. In short, he had not the slightest objection to sitting on the sofa beside the fair Lydia and bestowing on her such embraces as the occasion seemed to suggest. For the eternal masculine survives even bereavement and a diet of Calvinism.

Lydia was now thirty-three years old, ten years his

junior, and did not look her age. Possessing no beauty of face, she was yet pleasing to look at, having a slender, graceful and stylish figure and fairly regular features. In coloring she was fair, with an abundance of light, sandy hair, not pretty in itself, but always arranged with the neatest precision in the latest style, a passable complexion, and eyes which were oftener green than gray. Her clothes were really as fashionable as her hair, but they were of tints so carefully subdued to the supposed ministerial standard and were so trimly put on that William would merely have called her "neatly dressed." It was a great surprise to him later to find how many hours of the day were consumed in the adornment of her person. Her voice and manner have already been sufficiently characterized by Isabel and Jessie, but it must be added that they never varied. Years after, Isabel said of her: "Of course her sweetness masked something that wasn't at all sweet, but she never—but once—dropped the mask. No matter what happened, her tones were always honeyed and she always looked at you with that same holy expression."

In fact, Lydia believed in herself and admired her own character immensely. She thought that it was a lovely, meek, unselfish Christian character. In reality, she was consumed with ambition. A marriage with the Reverend William Stirling was the most ambitious alliance she could make, according to her ideas at that time, which were based on the Ptolemy standard of the period. For Ptolemy never had been an aristocratic place, but had grown up from humble beginnings; and if, here and there, a family had some traditions of past honors, not much was said by them about those things, for one must live with one's neighbors, and past honors do not always mean present prosperity. As to that, William Stirling's family had been a good one. As to present standards, Ptolemy was a village of churches, of which the Presbyterian was the largest and richest; and its pastor was indubitably the most eligible unmarried man of a suitable age to be found there. The Episcopal church, which

Lydia afterward grew to value, was the smallest of them all and its parishioners made no great stir.

Meantime, Lydia's question is unanswered. For the matter of that, her William had to leave it so. He did not know what Isabel thought because he had not spoken to her of her prospects. Of course, however, she would accept the new mother with gratitude and affection.

"But she won't if she is not properly told of it," replied Lydia, who was nothing if not diplomatic. "Oh, you innocent man!" She drew a caressing hand down his sleeve. "Suppose you let me see her and talk to her. She is surely well enough now to see me."

Yes, Isabel was well enough and Lydia might call when she would. Eliza should be instructed to let her see the child alone. The following day saw her at the parsonage, much startled at the change in Isabel, who had been a pretty child and would, so Lydia fancied, have been an ornamental adjunct to the wedding, walking up the aisle with a basket of flowers. That idea was promptly abandoned when she looked at the closely cropped hair, the thin, pale face, the little sticks of legs and the bony wrists, with the disproportionate hands and feet of her "dear little daughter." But she overflowed with endearments, holding the thin hand in her own gloved fingers, and made her announcement with tender promises of the good times coming when they should all be living so happily together. Nevertheless, the visit was not a great success; for what could one do with such an utterly unresponsive child? Isabel was not propitiated, for Father ought to have told her himself.

When the wedding-day came she was dressed in a brand new frock and drove to the church with Aunt Eliza in a much grander carriage than had ever before been at her disposal. She and her aunt sat in the front pew on one side of the aisle, whence she looked across at the Marvins in the corresponding pew on the other side. Presently Lydia, in all the chaste splendor of her heavy white silk gown, with its long train and the bridal tulle and orange blossoms, came sweeping up the aisle on

Father's arm, William Stirling having refused such complexities as bridesmaids and a bride's escort of Brother-in-law Marvin. And then a friend of Father's from a neighboring town stepped forward and married them in a very few words.

At the reception afterwards, the Marvin girls were very good to Isabel, taking charge of her at supper, piling her plate with all sorts of goodies and giving her more than the one box of wedding cake allotted to her. That was all very well, but she wished that, among all those grown-ups, she could have had just Jessie. She felt shy and out of place, and when she heard the two nieces slyly making fun of the bride, her cheeks burned. The bride was Father's wife now, strange as it seemed. She listened, dreading lest they should say anything disrespectful about him. It was absurd enough to be sure, for Lydia to be putting on airs of being in love at her age, but if anyone had made fun of Father it would have been too awful to bear. All unknown to herself, the chief compensation for his unapproachableness had been the respect which everyone showed him. One might never have been able to love him very much, but there was some satisfaction in being proud of him. Her alarm was groundless. William Stirling bore himself well in a position which Lydia's airs and graces made a difficult one. No one even cast a disrespectful glance at him.

The reception was over at last. The bride and groom started off on their wedding journey, and Aunt Eliza took Isabel home and sent her to bed.

IX

DURING the interval which elapsed before the return of the wedded pair, Aunt Eliza busied herself with the final polishing of a house which already shone with cleanness, and Isabel spent more time than ever at the Giffords'. She dreaded the return of her father and his wife, and for the first time in her life failed to welcome a new experience. The weeks passed, and presently Aunt Eliza was packing her trunks for departure; for she did not intend that the bride should find her there. In view of her responsibilities, her going was planned with a nicety which left the smallest possible interval between the old and the new régime. As soon as their handkerchiefs should be seen waving from the car window on the opposite hill—the signal which she had requested—she was to step into the waiting carriage which would carry her to the station to take the outgoing train.

At the appointed time all was in readiness. The table was set for supper, the last directions had been given to Ann, Isabel stood at the front door.

"Well, good-bye, Isabel," she said. "Don't forget to take your tonic and keep out of drafts."

"Yes, ma'am," said Isabel.

"And remember, I expect you to write to me every week."

"Yes, ma'am," repeated Isabel.

Aunt Eliza put her hand on the child's shoulder and gave her a dry kiss. It was the touch of the hand and not the kiss which moved Isabel out of her forlorn, shy reserve. She looked up into her aunt's face.

"I'm sorry you're going away," she said, and suddenly put her arms around Aunt Eliza's neck.

Aunt Eliza patted her shoulder and gave her another

short kiss. "Be a good girl," she said a little huskily, and hurried into the carriage, winking unaccustomed tears from her eyes.

Isabel went and sat in the parlor until she heard the wheels of the arriving carriage. Then she ran and opened the door, feeling that to be a duty of hospitality. Lydia ran up the steps first, but at the door hung back, waiting. Apparently she did not see Isabel.

"Well, why don't you go in?" asked her husband, as, after paying the hackman, he followed her, his hands full of traveling impedimenta.

"Dearest! You must lead me into our home," said Lydia.

He glanced down at the bags and wraps and stepped into the house in front of her. "Come!" he said. "It is no strange place to you."

Finding herself in danger of being left behind, she clutched at his sleeve and was thus drawn inside. Mr. Stirling deposited his burdens on floor and chairs and turning, saw Isabel.

"How do you do, Isabel," he said, kissing her briefly.

Lydia, who now seemed to see her for the first time, precipitated herself on her. "My dear little daughter!" she exclaimed. "So you came to the door to welcome your new mother. That was sweet of you."

On the whole, Isabel preferred Father's and Aunt Eliza's way of kissing. There were more trying things in reserve than being kissed, however. The supper, for which Aunt Eliza had made such careful preparations, passed off very well, Lydia praising everything. Afterwards they sat in the parlor until nine o'clock—a new thing for Father, who usually went at once to his study. The striking of the clock was always the signal for Isabel to go to bed, and she rose shyly, on account of the good-night which must be said, but promptly, because she was longing to get away.

"You haven't called me Mother yet," said Lydia playfully, as the child turned to her.

Isabel flushed painfully. She expected to say it. That

was what made the good-night so hard. It was more difficult than ever now. She stood in the doorway, swallowing hard.

"Isabel!" said her father sternly.

She straightened herself and held her head high. "Good-night—Mother!" she said. And then to her father, reproachfully—"I was going to!"

It was the nearest approach to an impertinence that he had ever heard from her.

The day after her arrival Lydia inspected her new domain from garret to cellar. At dinner she remarked:

"I find we have one empty room—that room off your study. It will make a delightful little snugger for me, with my desk and sofa, which I'll bring up from Laura's, and all my books and pictures. And it will be so sweet to be near you when you are in your study."

William looked up from the joint which he was carving. He was the husband now, and not merely the lover. He was, more than all, the minister, whose privacy must not be invaded.

"It will be impossible for you to have that room, Lydia. All the rest of the house is yours, but I cannot have any-one passing through my study."

Lydia smiled sweetly. "Dear William," she said, "as if I should wish to disturb you!"

Isabel sat with her eyes cast down. She always tried to forget what that room had been used for.

A day or two later Father drove off in a hired buggy to spend a morning in the country, calling on some out-lying parishioners. Pretty soon Isabel, who was not considered well enough to go to school, and was wandering about, somewhat bored with her leisure, saw a wagon come to the door, piled with the belongings which Lydia had left at her sister's house. She was surprised and a little frightened when they were carried through the study into the empty room. Aunt Eliza had left it quite clean and there was a matting on the floor. The writing desk and sofa, a small bookcase and a couple of chairs were put in place. With the help of the man who had

brought them up, wedding presents were unpacked, pictures were hung, all with the greatest dispatch. A rug was laid down, a small table was taken out of one upstairs room, a couple of chairs out of another, until the "snuggery" was completely furnished. Then Lydia dismissed the man and sent Isabel into the sitting-room to lie down, while she seated herself gracefully at her writing desk, with the door open between the two rooms.

Isabel felt that she must know what happened when Father came home. It was the first time in her life that she had known him to be defied. When she heard him drive up, she got up from the sofa and went across the hall to the parlor, which was next to the study.

"What does this mean?" she heard him ask, in a tone which recalled the earlier uses of the little room.

Isabel trembled, but Lydia did not seem to be in the least frightened. "I knew you would like it when you saw how pretty it could be made," she said sweetly. "Of course I had to do it immediately, because the Marvins are already packing up to leave."

Without a word he turned on his heel and left the room. Isabel heard his determined footsteps going along the hall and out of the front door.

It was nearly one o'clock, the hour for their dinner. They waited half an hour for him and then he returned and seated himself at the table, with no allusion to anything that had happened. Lydia's manner was unruffled. Isabel was intensely curious and greatly pleased that somebody besides herself should be the culprit. Presently the heavy steps of workmen were heard in the hall, and the sound of tools laid down.

"What is going on?" asked Lydia, starting up.

"Keep your seat!" said her husband.

But she did not keep her seat. She went out and found that the men had been ordered to cut a door from the little room into the hall. She was not gone long, for she worked quickly, collecting sheets, with which, the workmen helping her, she covered up her precious belongings.

"You must excuse me for going," she said, as she

seated herself at the table again, "but broken plaster does make such a dust. You didn't think of that, did you? But it was lovely of you, dearest, to think of the door. Now it will be *quite* perfect."

William Stirling made no reply, nor did he speak again during the meal. As soon as the opening had been made into the hall he locked the door communicating with his study and put the key on the ring which he carried in his pocket. Some days later, when she again arranged the room, Lydia placed her sofa against that door; and if, reclining there, she sometimes overheard confidences made to the minister which were not intended for her ears, clearly that was William's fault, since if he had left things alone, the sofa would have remained against the other wall, and he would always have known whether she was in the room or not. But William, who with all his severity was not suspicious, did not know how easily one could hear through that door. As for Isabel, she stood in the new doorway of the "snuggery" and sighed with thankfulness that it was at last like other rooms.

X

IN these days Isabel did not confide in Jessie. An instinct of loyalty forbade her to speak about what went on in the house. Lydia's coquettish ways with her father excited her derision, and on the rare occasions when she surprised her father in the act of responding to his wife's endearments she was filled with disgust and mortification. Father was too old for such romantic doings. They made him ridiculous. Lydia misunderstood the expression on her candid face. One day she said archly: "Our little daughter mustn't be jealous!" Isabel found that hard to forgive.

So she and Jessie talked of everything except of what was uppermost in their thoughts; for, naturally, Jessie was curious. Some things, to be sure, she could see for herself, for the new mother had no idea of shutting out visitors. All of Isabel's friends were urged to come to see her. This was a pleasant innovation. In fact, it had to be admitted that many features of the new régime were pleasant, and in the natural rebound of the child's nature toward life and health she was ready to welcome whatever was agreeable.

In the management of the house there were radical changes. Ann was soon dismissed, but Isabel had never been attached to Ann as she was to Norah, and it was a relief to get rid of her heavy-footed, blundering service at meals. Two servants took her place, for Lydia had a little income of her own with which William Stirling was far too proud to interfere. He never asked how much it was nor for what it was spent, really fancying it to be less than was the case. He observed with satisfaction that his wife's name was always put down for contributions to missions and other church work. As to

the details of household economy, he had never been observant, having always been made comfortable by his mother and later by Eliza, on the allowance from his salary. He was now made much more comfortable by Lydia, who was a good housekeeper and skilled in the art of getting the utmost possible value from every cent that she spent. His table was better supplied and better served than ever before, and since there was nothing in his Presbyterian creed which forbade his enjoying the good things of the table—except on certain rare and specially appointed days of “prayer and fasting,” he profited pleasurably by her housewifely skill.

Unfortunately for Isabel, however, his conscience was not at rest with regard to her spiritual welfare. It reproached him when he realized how much he had been absorbed in his own temporal affairs. Here was the child for whose soul he was responsible, barely recovered from a dangerous illness, which ought by all means to have been made a means of grace to her, yet still unconverted. During this time of physical weakness she might easily have been led into the steep and narrow way which a Christian must travel. In the absence of a real love for her, his responsibility loomed large. Woe to him if he did not fulfil the trust!

No more time was to be lost, and in pursuance of his duty as he saw it, Isabel was called into his study, not once, but many times. Unfortunately the Reverend William Stirling lacked the gift of persuasion. He talked to her solemnly, prayed with her fervently, and questioned her unsparingly. To the child this was torture. In addition to the unapproachable shyness of her age with regard to such matters, she had as yet only seen the supreme awfulness of religion. Never, since the day when she had gone to the Inquiry meeting, had she willingly opened her lips on the subject of her own inner experience. Nor was she any nearer now than she had been before to regarding the Deity who was presented to her with the feelings which were required. Not being very strong as yet, she wept copiously, which irritated

her father extremely. She could not, however, pretend to feelings which did not exist. She could only say, through her sobs, that she would like to feel as he wanted her to if she only could. But she couldn't.

Such obstinacy seemed to him to be of the Devil. He had not yet learned that a child of his, and a girl at that, could be a distinct entity, apart from him, with a mind which was not a mere emanation from his own. Moreover, his demon told him that if he could not bring his own child into the fold he could hardly be counted a success in his calling. As to her youth—many children of her age were already members of his church.

He fancied that he had been persuasive. Now he waxed lurid in his warnings of the punishments reserved for those who refused the means of grace. He was an obstinate man and renewed the struggle day after day. As a natural result, the child, in whose cheeks the rose of health had just begun to bloom again, lost color and strength and crept about the house like a pale little ghost, always in terror of that summons to the study.

Lydia, who was quite aware of what was going on, was in her secret heart a good deal bored by both father and child. She was still a bride. This, she felt, should be her own special summer and it was being spoiled. It was a case, however, where she was likely to injure her prestige if she undertook to interfere. Only once she said to Isabel:

"Cannot my little daughter do what Father wishes and unite with the church? It seems very unnecessary to make so much difficulty about it."

Isabel, who thought that her father had been talking about her, which was not the case, would not make any reply at all, but left the room.

It was in the hot days of August that her troubles came to a climax with what she called a ball in her throat. A large round lump seemed to have settled there and to be threatening her with suffocation. It was so terribly alarming that she mentioned it to Lydia, who looked into her throat and assured her that there was nothing there.

Nevertheless, it remained. Sometimes, when she was out of doors she would cease to feel it, but as soon as she came into the house and sat down, there it was again. After the Sunday morning when, gathering up all her courage, she walked out of church in the middle of Father's sermon, lest the worse evil befall her of strangling to death in full sight of the congregation, Lydia sent for the doctor.

"A little run down," was his verdict; "and needs a tonic." If he had ventured to mention hysteria there was no knowing what reports might get around. They would call it hysterics, for one thing.

"You jump into my buggy with me," he said to Isabel, "and I'll take you to my office and get something fixed up. It will do you good to get out of doors."

He kept her out all the morning, trying diplomatically to find out what was the matter with her. One couldn't ask in so many words whether the cat of a stepmother was abusing her, and the real cause of the trouble did not occur to him. She brightened up a little however, and said that the lump in her throat was better. Then he took her home with him.

"Have you ever been inside my house?" he asked.

Isabel couldn't remember. The outside of the house was familiar of course, and the little front yard behind the white wooden palings, with the grass plot on each side of the flagged walk that led to the door, and the lilac and syringa bushes near the house, and the two red peonies, one on each side of the walk, just inside the gate. It was a white house with green blinds, a verandah across the front, a fan-light over the door and two windows on each side.

Isabel followed him in, peeping shyly but curiously in at the parlor on the right before he led her into the room on the left. This was the waiting-room of his office, furnished stiffly with heavy old mahogany pieces; a book-case with glass doors, a round centre-table, littered with old magazines, a haircloth sofa, a large rocking chair which tipped back alarmingly when you sat down in it,

and half a dozen straight chairs. They went through this room to the office back of it, which was also the doctor's study. This room, too, was furnished with heavy mahogany, but was far more livable than the other. There were two windows looking out on a big back-yard, shady with trees, and between them was an old secretary, its flap down, showing pigeonholes full of papers, while behind the little pointed panes of the bookcase which surmounted it were all sorts of bottles and boxes. There was a comfortable sofa in the room, an easy-chair and a large square table covered with books and magazines; and there was a fireplace with brass andirons and fender and on the mantel over it was a row of framed photographs.

"Sit down here," said the doctor, "and we'll have an egg-nog." Going to the door, he called: "Norah!"

The name aroused memories in Isabel and she turned her head. Astonishing to say, it was the Norah of the old days of Grandma who came in response to the summons. She was married now, and she and Michael, her husband, had recently come to live with the doctor. Isabel knew her at once, though she had not seen her for years.

"Oh, Norah!" she exclaimed, jumping up. "Don't you know me?"

Norah didn't know her, but she was delighted and voluble; also shocked, although she refrained from mentioning it.

"This little lady needs an egg-nog," said the doctor. "You go and beat the egg, Norah, and I'll bring you just a tiny drop of the crathur to put in it."

When he went into the kitchen Norah was shaking her head and exclaiming, while she beat her egg. "But what's the matther wid the child?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Dr. Brenton slowly. "I'm trying to find out."

"'Tis me own opinion," said Norah, holding her egg-beater suspended in the air, "that they're killin' her wid their religion. 'Tis a cruel religion intirely."

She began to beat the liquor in, drop by drop, and the doctor stood by, frowning thoughtfully. He had his clue.

When he came back to his office Isabel was standing by the mantel, looking at the photographs.

"Who are they?" she asked.

"My nieces," he told her. "I had a sister who went out to Kansas and these are her children."

"So many?"

"Only two—at different ages. This is Anne and this is Mary. And these are Anne and Mary when they were smaller. Here, take this egg-nog and drink it, every drop."

She took the glass, but still looked at the pictures. "They're grown up now, aren't they? Everybody has relations but me. I wish my mother had had brothers and sisters. I wish these were my cousins—each picture a separate cousin."

"Well, let's adopt them. I'll tell them when I write that they have a cousin here."

He kept her with him for another half-hour and made her talk to him. She told him more than she was aware of, with the result that he went to William Stirling and told him that the child must have a complete and long-continued change, unless he were willing to take the risk of having her an invalid for life, or perhaps losing her altogether.

William demurred. Her place was at home. Yet his confidence in Dr. Brenton as a physician deprived his objections of force. One final argument he had. "There is no place to send her," he said, "so that ends it."

"How about Eliza?"

"Eliza is in a boarding school—or will be in a few weeks. She is out of the question."

"Ask her. It won't hurt the child to go to school—in moderation, and will occupy her mind. Ask Eliza if she can't have her there."

William could not refuse. He wrote to his sister, not knowing that John Brenton had also written. To his surprise, Eliza replied that she had consulted Miss Pryor and had found the arrangement quite feasible; and that the expense of it would be her affair. William yielded

reluctantly, but insisted on sharing the expense. He had a sense of being baffled, but underneath was a relief which he would on no account have admitted to himself. For the rest, he fancied that he could trust his sister to carry out his ideas.

Lydia, under sweet and sympathizing speeches, disguised her pleasure at getting rid of such a depressing "little daughter." She went to work zealously and efficiently. Under her capable supervision a seamstress prepared a simple outfit. A trunk was bought and packed, and Aunt Eliza came back to get her niece. In truth, Aunt Eliza was glad to have the child, having lately found out how much she loved her; and she was besides grimly pleased that Lydia had so soon been found wanting, that being her version of the need for a change.

XI

OVER on the other hill at last! As the train steamed slowly along its lower level, then went backward and in its zigzag course passed higher up, Isabel gazed out eagerly. But even now she had not gone high enough to look over the top of the hill. As far as she could see, the ground still rose, not steeply, but in a gentle ascent. It was a country of prosperous, uninteresting farms. She crossed the aisle and looked out of the opposite window, across the ravine, for a last glimpse of the parsonage, and managed to recognize it, small and unfamiliar though it looked. No one waved a handkerchief, but the omission did not sadden her. She turned contentedly to Aunt Eliza. "I like to travel," she said.

It was a long and tiresome journey before, at nine o'clock in the evening, they arrived in New York, where they spent the night in a quiet hotel which seemed a grand place to Isabel. On the verge of sleep, she murmured happily: "I haven't felt the ball in my throat all day."

The next day, at the Twenty-seventh Street station, they came into what seemed like an enormous family party. Girls chattering and laughing, greeting and kissing; mothers and elder sisters seeing them off; cries of joy, rapturous embraces, as friends met again after the vacation. Isabel had never imagined so many Marys, Kates and Annies. There was also a Lily, a Laura, a Josie, even a Rebecca, not so dignified as her name. She gazed at them wistfully, feeling out of it all. "Don't you know any of them?" she asked Aunt Eliza.

"I've been away from the school for seven years," said her aunt. "None of them last as long as that. We shall know them soon enough."

They all crowded on the cars, not a train yet, but each

car drawn by two horses through the tunnel. Forty-Second Street, where they were coupled together and an engine put on, was so far uptown that very few persons got on there.

The train went on its leisurely way, stopping every few miles at some small station. Isabel never forgot the names of those stopping-places, from Mount Vernon, nearest New York, to Milford, next to New Haven. Then the change at New Haven, where the signs—"Beware of pickpockets"—made one look around anxiously and clutch one's pocketbook. Then a train again, slower than ever, with a boy coming through from time to time with his tin water-bucket, and the two glasses in their racks. No one knew anything about germs in those days. And finally the brakeman called—"Mornington!"—and they all got out.

There were vehicles standing in the road on the other side of the station. Two more miles to go, first along a country road, then over a stone bridge where a little river joins a larger one, then a little way farther and they turn into the village street with its overarching elms and its houses set a little way back in their yards; colonial houses, many of them somewhat rusty, but unspoiled by alterations. At last they draw up in front of a large brick house, very near the street, with a two-story verandah across the front and a big yard on each side. Everybody jumps out and they all run up the two steps to the verandah; but they do not rush into the house pell-mell. For just inside the door stands a small woman; though the girls somehow never think of her as small. A middle-aged woman, with an insignificant figure and a plain rugged face, which is far from insignificant. There is power in that face; kindness too, and a glint of humor. There is no beauty, as the schoolgirl understands beauty, except the fine line of the head from the forehead over to the knot of hair at the back, and the smooth brown hair itself, as yet barely touched with gray. This is Miss Pryor, at fifty, or thereabout.

The girls have stood back for Aunt Eliza, who enters

first, followed by Isabel. Hanging back timidly, the child is struck by something new to her in her aunt's bearing and expression; a flush in the cheek, a light in the eye, a deference of manner she has never seen before. Her own greeting over, Miss Stirling draws Isabel forward. "This is my niece, Isabel Stirling," she says.

Miss Pryor takes Isabel by the hand and looks kindly at her before she kisses her. "You will find your old room arranged for you and Isabel," she says to Aunt Eliza.

Isabel, looking back from the foot of the stairs, sees that each girl, as she enters, is briefly kissed. In the sixties the school is still like a family. They are subdued for an instant, but presently they bubble over again as they throng toward the stairs.

Isabel follows Aunt Eliza up one flight and along the hall, into a room, not large, furnished with two single beds, a wardrobe, bureau, washstand, table, two straight chairs and a rocking chair. A set of hanging shelves and the waste basket, the latter to be known henceforth as "scrappy," complete the furniture.

XII

SCHOOL life is intensely interesting. The first few days are unsettled. Miss Pryor is arranging the classes personally, supervising the list of studies of each one of the seventy girls, seeing that one's Latin recitation doesn't interfere with one's hour for a music or a drawing lesson; straightening out endless tangles. For there are no grades into which a girl fits. Each one is considered separately.

Nearly all night Miss Pryor sits at her desk in her own room at the end of the Second Hall. There is a legend among the girls that she never goes to bed at all, at any time; for, when the classes are arranged and everything is in running order, she devotes those midnight hours to reading and writing.

In two days the confusion is ended and the school under way for the year. Isabel finds herself in a large arithmetic class, taught, not by Aunt Eliza, whose time is filled up by more advanced mathematics, but by Miss Pryor herself, who seems always to take what others have no time for. Isabel likes those arithmetic lessons, in the corner of the big schoolroom, the girls sitting on two benches against the wall, at right angles to each other. Behind one bench is a window, looking out on a grassy space shaded by old trees. Miss Pryor's chair is on a low platform, a table beside her, and on the floor opposite her stands the blackboard. Always Isabel is to remember the tolerant little laugh with which Miss Pryor shifts herself in her chair in order to see the blackboard when a left-handed girl comes to make figures on it. As she is to find out later, Aunt Eliza is less considerate. Under her rule, a girl who can draw perfectly beautiful geometri-

cal figures with her left hand is made to look foolish and feel irritated by being compelled to draw crooked and ineffectual lines with her right hand, in order to satisfy Miss Stirling's demand for uniformity.

Isabel also finds herself studying Latin with Miss Pryor—Harkness Arnold's First Latin Book. She has her recitation in the afternoon, during study hour. In the three rooms known as study halls the girls sit around extension tables which have been drawn out for them. She leaves her seat there and goes out into the hall. There is an ell halfway down the hall, lighted by a double glass door giving on the garden. There she and Miss Pryor sit side by side on a large, old-fashioned sofa, while she recites her lesson. She has a certain facility in learning and soon discovers that Miss Pryor overrates her. She really knows far less than her teacher thinks she does. Is she to confess it? Never! It is too wonderful an experience to have Miss Pryor, of whose intellect the whole school stands in awe, think that she is really clever. She does what she can to maintain the illusion. The result is a lack of thoroughness in Latin grammar, but a stimulation of her ambition such as she has never experienced before. She finishes her recitation and goes back to the study hall with her head held high.

Rules and restrictions hold an unimportant place in Isabel's consciousness. To her, the keynote of the school is freedom. Freedom to think and to talk; freedom to associate with chosen companions. She has to get up at a certain hour, it is true, but so do all the others. Once up and dressed and out of her room, she is in a world of surpassing interest. After prayers there is breakfast, and at the table she can talk as much as she likes, and she likes to talk a great deal. She goes through the morning happily. Lessons are no trouble. Teachers are more or less interesting. She begins the study of French. Madame Boulanger is odd, not too tidy, and a little too affectionate. The girls dislike her mustache and the way she runs her knitting needle through her thick wavy hair. She calls her favorites "*ma minette*," and insists on kiss-

ing them. Her beautiful accent is a matter which her pupils appreciate later in life; also her thoroughness.

One has to go out walking twice a day; a short walk in the morning after breakfast, a long one in the afternoon; but one goes where one likes; down to the river, up to the bluff, along the road to Diamond Glen, or simply up and down the street. There are no dangers and no supervision is needed; the girls are trusted. Walking engagements are made for Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and so on, up to Saturday. Naturally, a new girl, and much the youngest in school, does not at first choose her companions, but waits to be chosen. Isabel is not fortunate in her first walking mate, for she is invited to walk on Monday afternoons by Dora Holt, a pale-faced, red-lipped girl of fourteen. Dora is dressed in mourning.

"I'm in black for my brother," she told Isabel during their first walk.

"Oh!" said Isabel sympathetically. She wished she could think of something more to say.

"Yes," Dora went on, "I've lost my father and mother and two sisters and a brother—all of consumption. We all have it in my family. I shall have it some day." She spoke cheerfully, even with a certain complacency, as if feeling the importance of being under a Doom.

"How dreadful!" said Isabel. There seemed nothing adequate that she could say. Casting her eyes down, she noticed that Dora wore the thinnest of paper-soled kid boots, although the walks were wet and soft after a rain. "Why don't you wear rubbers?" she asked. "You'll bring it on quicker."

"Oh, no I won't," replied Dora calmly. "Nothing will make any difference." She brought a little paper bag of chocolate creams out of her pocket. "Have one," she invited.

"Thank you," said Isabel, helping herself. "But who takes care of you?" she asked.

"My guardian," said Dora importantly, aware that a guardian sounded very grand and just like a novel. "He

sends me money whenever I ask him." She stopped to put a chocolate cream into her mouth. "Old Bowles doesn't give you many for ten cents, does he? I think it's rather mean to say we shan't spend but ten cents a week on candy, but then of course we don't keep to it. Last week I spent a dollar."

"I'm afraid I'll have to keep to it," said Isabel. She declined the offer of another.

"Did you ever know anyone who died of heart disease?" asked Dora.

"No, I don't think so."

"My most intimate friend died of it. She was going to a picnic one day, and when she stooped over to lace her shoes, she just dropped dead. She'd had heart disease for a good while."

"How awful!" Isabel wondered whether she would ever feel safe when she was lacing her own shoes.

Dora's conversation was alarming, but had a certain fascination until you got used to it. Isabel herself was less fluent than usual.

"I hope my blue worsted will come to-night," said Dora. "I shall die if I can't begin my shawl soon. I'm going to knit it for Kate Grey. Light blue—star-stitch."

"I never could knit a shawl," said Isabel, "and I'd never want to."

"Oh, yes, you would, if you were in love with a girl. I'm in such a hurry to give it to her. I've just given her a fascinator—did the most of it sitting up in bed after the lights were out. Enough light comes in over the screen from the hall, you know. Have you fallen in love with anybody yet, Isabel?"

Isabel laughed. "I never heard anything so funny," she said. "No, I don't fall in love. I'm not that kind of person."

"You wait!" said Dora. She smacked her red lips over the last of the chocolate creams.

On the whole, Isabel was sorry that she had to walk with Dora every Monday that term. It gave her a stuffy feeling.

On Tuesday she walked with Francie Hale. Francie was an elfish child of about the same age as Dora; thin and pale, with a mass of long, dry, loosely curled light brown hair, which stood out electrically and made her sharp little face look sharper than ever. Francie was rather serious and somewhat fantastic in her ideas. She took an interest in her lessons and was just now much concerned because her teachers would not answer all her questions.

"If they would only tell me *why*," she would say. "I think a teacher always ought to be willing to tell you why. It's only reasonable. But Miss Pryor is the only one who thinks you have a right to ask. But, of course, she's the only one who knows all there is to know about things."

"I shouldn't think she'd want to teach arithmetic and Harkness Arnold," said Isabel.

"Oh," said Francie sagely, "I don't believe she finds it any worse than teaching anything else. You see, even the most advanced girls are only beginners compared with her. And I think she cares as much about the girls as she does about the lessons—and so, you see, looking at it that way, we're worth as much as the older ones."

"Suppose Laura Green and Emma Olney should hear you say that! My, my!"

"They wouldn't hear—even if we shouted it in their ears. They don't know we exist—those older girls. They don't care for anything but to be intimate with the younger teachers."

"I shouldn't think they would," said Isabel. "Miss Carter——" She sighed. . . .

Naturally, you walk with the girls nearest your own age. Great then, was Isabel's surprise and pleasure when Margaret Hartington asked her for one afternoon a week. Margaret was sixteen, and in appearance and mind, mature for her years. She was treated with consideration by the teachers, especially by Miss Pryor herself, and had a circle of warm and admiring friends among the older girls. Yet she had lost her heart to

Isabel, and, subtlest of flattery, treated her as an intellectual equal. Isabel talked to her more freely than to anyone else. Before long she even found herself speaking to Margaret of religion, the subject on which, usually, her lips were sealed.

Margaret belonged to the Episcopal church and was a devout churchwoman, and Isabel's curiosity was aroused by her affection for her church and by her evident lack of fear. It must be nice, she thought, to have a religion that you are not afraid of. She asked questions; and they fell into a discussion of doctrinal points. It was not for nothing that Isabel had been brought up on the Shorter Catechism.

Fronting on the village street was an old, disused cemetery, and over its gate an arch, inscribed: "Memento Mori." Sitting on the steps under the arch, with a paper bag of sweets tucked between them—a concession to Isabel's youth, provided by Margaret—the two discussed Infant Baptism between mouthfuls.

"In your church," said Isabel seriously, "you believe that baptism really does something to a baby?"

"Yes, the child is taken into the church and made a little Christian; and given a start in the right way."

"And really made different in some way from unbaptized children?"

"Yes, we believe that."

"Then," said Isabel, "I can see some sense in infant baptism. In our church I don't see any sense in it."

They talk of many other things in those walks. Isabel grows to know Margaret's father and mother, sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts and cousins. It seems to be an immense clan. She reposes on Margaret's large-hearted affection with a restfulness which she has not felt since that long-past time when she clung to Grandma's hand.

There is no Episcopal church in Mornington and the girls who belong to that communion are allowed to drive to a neighboring town on the first Sunday in the month.

"Wouldn't you like to go with me just once?" Margaret asks Isabel.

It is not difficult to obtain the permission, for Miss Pryor adopts all means to keep Isabel in the open air. She is not yet robust. It is a thrilling adventure. With Margaret's little prayer-book in her hand, she carefully kneels and stands at the proper places and, in a timid whisper, makes the responses. Actually to kneel in church, instead of just leaning over and propping one's head on one's hymn-book, is an exciting experience. The music which, for a country church, is not bad, seems to her angelic. She is carried away by an emotion which is almost religious.

During the drive home she is silent. Later, she is able to discriminate.

"Do you love God really, or do you only love your church?" she asks Margaret.

"Why, Isabel!" exclaims Margaret. Then she falls into thought. "You love this school, don't you?" she says at last.

"Yes, I love it tremendously."

"Much more than you love Miss Pryor herself?"

"I suppose so."

"But without Miss Pryor there wouldn't be this school. Some day perhaps the school will seem a small thing beside Miss Pryor."

"I understand. But Margaret—one couldn't exactly love Father's church. There's just the minister—and God. Perhaps you mightn't like the minister. They say you've got to love God. They don't give you anything to begin with." . . .

In memory of this day Margaret gave Isabel the little prayer-book, on the fly leaf of which was written, in her fine, slanting hand, the prayer of Mary, Queen of Scots: *Fecisti nos ad te, Domine; et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te.*

XIII

ONE says one is "not that kind of person," and then one falls in love all the same. Isabel fell in love with Miss Carter.

She and Nelly Joyce recited English history to Miss Carter every afternoon during the last half-hour of study hour. It was an informal sort of recitation, the two girls sitting on a long haircloth sofa placed across the window in the Third Hall (meaning the third story), and the teacher in a low chair opposite. Miss Carter was only twenty, tall and slender, with dark eyes and a handsome, interesting face. She had been brought up in luxury and when, just at the end of her school-days, financial misfortune came, Miss Pryor had given her a position. Nelly Joyce was her cousin and called her Cousin Eleanor. Isabel envied Nelly that privilege.

It seems that the only way you can show your adoration of a teacher is to learn your lessons very perfectly. Isabel's knowledge of English history grew by leaps and bounds. Never was the list of kings recited more glibly, never was their genealogy more thoroughly mastered; while as for the great events, she had them all at her tongue's end. Miss Carter's praise was very sweet.

Occasionally there was time after the recitation for a little conversation. Isabel hung on every word of the teacher. Miss Carter recognized the adoration with kindly amusement. One day when Nelly had appealed to "Cousin Eleanor" on some matter or other, Isabel sighed out:

"How nice to have a Cousin Eleanor!"

Miss Carter laughed. "I'll adopt you if you like," she said. "Would you like to be my little Cousin Isabel and call me Cousin Eleanor?"

A lovely color flooded Isabel's face from brow to chin. "Oh, yes!" she breathed fervently.

Yet it was hard work for her to get out the words. She was thinking "Cousin Eleanor" all day long, but she could scarcely ever say it. Whenever she met Miss Carter in the course of the day, her heart would begin to palpitate and the color would rush to her cheeks. Yet she would pass by with only a sidelong glance.

One day Miss Carter held out a detaining hand. "Why don't you speak to me?" she asked.

"I—I don't know," faltered Isabel.

"Say, 'Good-morning, Cousin Eleanor,'" commanded Miss Carter.

Isabel looked up at her and made a great effort. "Good-morning — Cousin Eleanor" — the last words hardly audible.

"You shy child," laughed Miss Carter, as she passed on. How then was Miss Carter to understand what happened that very afternoon?

Isabel had been praised by another teacher for her "compositions." She was cultivating her English; and where should she be so careful in the matter of style as in her recitations to Miss Carter? The best must be offered at that shrine. It fell to her to give an account of Magna Charta. It occurred to her that she was repeating those words too often and that it would be well, in the interest of Style, to make a substitution. So she translated, according to her lights. "This great charter," said she.

"No," said Miss Carter, interrupting the smooth flow of her narrative. "Magna Charta."

"Yes," replied Isabel, intent on her version, "this great charter."

"But you mustn't call it that. Magna Charta!"

"It is the same thing," insisted Isabel. "I had said that so often. I just translated." The thought crossed her mind that Madame Boulanger would have understood instantly—but what difference did that make? "The great charter," she repeated.

"Charta!" commanded Miss Carter, accenting the hard C with firm determination.

"But Magna Charta and the great charter are the same," explained the pupil doggedly. She often wondered afterwards why it had never occurred to her to yield the point. At the time, it seemed to her absolutely necessary to stick to her version.

"Not charter—Charta." There was severity and displeasure in the teacher's tone.

Isabel suddenly lost her temper. "Oh, well then," she exclaimed, "the great Carter!"

Dead silence for an instant. Isabel was absolutely appalled by her pun, which had been entirely unintentional. But it was impossible for her to speak.

"Go to your room!" said Miss Carter; and she went, heartbroken.

It was the end. Miss Pryor bade her write a note of apology to Miss Carter for her impertinence. She achieved a very stiff one. If only they—Miss Pryor and Miss Carter—could understand! But it never occurred to her to try to explain to them. Miss Carter did not love her any more; Nelly, too, was cold to her, and she was very fond indeed of Nelly. And she loved Miss Carter still.

XIV

IN the spring came the Civil War. The girls were all excited by it and talked incessantly about it, yet on the whole it had very little effect on the life of the New England school, where there were no southern girls. True, Miss Pryor was deeply stirred. Every evening, before the other reading, she read the newspapers to the girls and made comments and explanations to which some of them wished afterwards that they had listened more attentively. Some of the girls talked of their brothers and cousins who had gone to the war, and one or two of them were daughters of officers of the regular army. Isabel mourned because she had no one belonging to her who could go, and thought seriously of inventing a cousin or two. She played with the idea. What adventures she could devise for them! But there was Aunt Eliza, who would inevitably hear of it. She reluctantly admitted the impossibility of the scheme.

Since she could not send heroes to the war, she made flag penwipers, mounted on penholders. With the other girls she made flannel shirts for the soldiers and came to grief over the buttonholes, which seemed too difficult for mortal fingers. The whole school thrilled when one of the young teachers went away hastily to be married to her soldier lover; and thrilled still more when, a few months later, the gallant young officer fell, mortally wounded.

Isabel had extraordinarily vivid dreams in those days. It took her some time to get over the feeling of acute mortification which she experienced when, finding herself in a dream battle, she gave way to terror and, turning to run away, was wounded in the back. She never forgot

the sensation of falling headlong on her face, and remembered saying to herself: "Now I know what it is to bite the dust."

At another time she found herself walking in the funeral procession of freckle-faced Dick Malden, whom she had never seen since that memorable day when she had gone home with Cassie. A Ptolemy paper which had been sent to Aunt Eliza had mentioned that he had entered West Point, but she knew nothing more about him.

For the rest, the girls learned their lessons, took their walks, quarrelled or fell in love with each other, just as usual. A war which lasted so long seemed a permanent condition. Before it was over, Isabel was one of the older girls.

Little by little, during these years, she changed her point of view with regard to Aunt Eliza. The Miss Stirling of the school seemed a different person from the anxious housekeeper of the parsonage. She actually seemed to grow younger; in fact, Isabel learned that she was not really as old as she had appeared to a child. It also became evident to eyes which were being educated that Aunt Eliza was handsome in a severe and classic way. More important than all, she was kinder than she had been in the old days; in fact, understanding the young girl far better than she had understood the child.

Isabel could not at once get over her astonishment when she found that her aunt did not take very seriously a little dust on the furniture of their room, or a few bits of paper falling out of "scrappy" and lying on the floor.

"You couldn't have stood that at home," she ventured to say.

"In your father's house," replied Aunt Eliza, "it was my duty to see that everything was in order. Here, it isn't my duty. It is Jane's."

"And you didn't do all those things about the house because you liked to?"

"No, I don't like housekeeping."

"Poor Aunt Eliza!" exclaimed the girl, filled with a new respect and sympathy for the slave to duty.

Her life with her father was more and more becoming a thing of the past. She had gone home for the first summer vacation, and had hoped shyly that she might find a baby there, or some prospect of one. But such a thing was not in Lydia's scheme. Isabel did not enjoy her visit and after that Aunt Eliza usually took her to the quiet places where she was fond of spending her own holidays. The adoption of her niece became actual, though not formal.

At fifteen, that period when the development of a girl's æsthetic and emotional nature inclines her to take kindly to genuflections, physical and spiritual, Isabel's interest in religion, which had for some time been dormant, was reawakened. Margaret had left school and she had no one to talk to, but she was thinking for herself. One day she made a great effort.

"Aunt Eliza," she said, "I should like to be confirmed in the Episcopal church."

Aunt Eliza looked at her in dismay. "It is impossible," she replied curtly. Then she added more gently. "I am very glad if you care to unite with the church, but of course, it must be your father's church. He has written me often about it, but I could not push you."

"But I don't like Father's church," said Isabel. "I don't want to belong to it. I want to belong to the Episcopal church."

"Your father never would permit it. And it would be scandalous. He a Presbyterian minister, and you going off to another church—and one that he disapproves of! When you think about it a little more you will see for yourself what you ought to do."

Isabel set her lips. "No," she said. "I can't do what you won't let me do—but I can't join Father's church."

Aunt Eliza was shocked and disappointed. That Isabel should now, of her own accord, desire to be (as her aunt expressed it) a Christian, would be intensely gratifying, if only she did not want to go about it in such an impossible way. In her perplexity, she confided in Miss Pryor and asked her to talk to Isabel.

Miss Pryor, the descendant of a line of Congregational ministers, and herself little inclined to pomps and ceremonies, had no particular sympathy with Episcopal ideas. Narrowness of any sort was foreign to her, but she was inclined to sympathize with the Presbyterian father, whom she had never seen. In her generation children walked in the same path as their parents. She talked earnestly to Isabel, and could not at first understand why the apparent unkindness of her proposed action should leave the girl so unmoved.

"If you love your father you will not wish to hurt him so," she said; and Isabel, fixing intent eyes on her, said nothing.

"After all, Isabel," pursued Miss Pryor, "we all worship one God, whatever our form of worship may be."

"No, Miss Pryor," replied Isabel. "That—that is just the trouble. It isn't the same God at all. Always—since I was little—I have been told that I must love God—and I don't love that one. I think I never shall. In Father's church there's a God I don't love, and there's Father who talks about Him. Nothing else. Honestly, I can't do it. They talk at the Communion service in Father's church about eating and drinking damnation. That's what I should be doing. You and Aunt Eliza have made me see that I can't belong to any other church. I can't honestly belong to Father's—and, besides, I don't want to."

Her voice was trembling. It had been hard work to say so much. Miss Pryor took her hand and held it closely. Evidently there had been mistakes made with this child; and there had been unhappiness. Her heart yearned over the girl. But it was a matter where one must walk warily.

"I'm glad you are honest," she said. "That is the first thing. Hold fast to your own integrity, my child. In time you will see how little external matters count. And, Isabel, even while you do not belong to any church, I hope you will always be a good Christian."

"A Christian—without belonging to a church?" said Isabel wonderingly. She had always heard the word used in the narrowest way.

"Christ was before churches," said Miss Pryor.

XV

ISABEL is seventeen now. The war is over at last. And school goes on as usual.

Isabel listens more understandingly than of old when Miss Pryor talks to the girls of a Saturday morning after prayers, and hears things which she remembers all her life. She is one of the older girls now, and feels with pride that she is of those whom Miss Pryor especially trusts. And she is the Beauty of the school. She is tall and slender, and, thanks to Aunt Eliza's unceasing watchfulness, has a beautiful erect carriage. She holds her head high on a perfectly formed, slim neck. She has well-cut features and her coloring, neither dark nor blonde, is delicately rich. Under golden brown hair and beautifully penciled eyebrows her darkly fringed, deep gray eyes look out with a singular intentness. It is perhaps that look in her eyes which one remembers best of all. But in addition, everything about her has a finished appearance, in refreshing contrast to the blunt noses, unfinished ears and indeterminate mouths and chins which one sees on so many passably pretty girls.

She is aware of her beauty and glad of it, but is without self-consciousness. In truth, her eager spirit has no time for simperings. She has her own group of friends, with whom she studies, walks and talks. Among them, no one quite takes the place of Margaret, but they are a gay, clever, attractive group, unconsciously and without seriousness exercising a stimulating effect on each other's intellects. Their discussions are endless and they have the most definite opinions on most of the great questions of life. To her amusement and embarrassment Isabel has worshipers among the younger girls. Offerings are laid at her feet, adoring little fourteen-year-olds flush

when she speaks to them and are in the seventh heaven when she graciously gives them a walking period now and then. She has conquered her world.

Of men and boys she knows nothing. Her aunt's vacations are spent in abodes of spinsterhood, uninvaded by man, and schoolgirl flirtations with accidental youths are an insult to her fine instincts as well as to the romance with which her imagination teems. Of the ideal man she has romantic notions, but feels for actual men a fine virginal scorn, only surpassed by the contempt in which she holds those schoolgirls who are always talking about some "He." She seeks her triumphs in the field of intellect and finds her satisfaction in classroom triumphs. Suddenly she is fired by a new ambition.

It has happened one day that Miss Pryor, emerging from her room, has seen Isabel sitting alone on the sofa in the second hall and, after a glance at her, has gone back and come out again with a small volume in her hand.

"I wonder," said Miss Pryor, handing her the book, "whether you can turn any of these into English verse." Then she went on downstairs, leaving Isabel breathless.

It was a book of Latin verse. She looked at it with mingled pride and despair. Well she knew that she was utterly incompetent for the task, but what joy to have Miss Pryor imagine that she could do it! She tried—and tried in vain. The next day she essayed some verses of her own. She read them fondly at first, but coldly the next day. The third day she destroyed them. Next, she decided to try prose; and what could one write in prose but a love-story? It didn't in the least matter that she knew nothing of love. Naturally, it was a war story; a girl who found her lover lying wounded in a hospital. Here, at last, she could send someone to the war and give him adventures. She wondered she had never thought of it before. She wrote with burning cheeks and palpitating heart of the lovers' meeting; and now began secretly to cherish shy dreams of a possible real lover—a Prince Charming whom she would one day meet.

She wrote during every spare moment for a week; then made a careful copy, without any real revision. Reading the story over critically, she decided that it was not good enough for *Harper's* or the *Atlantic*, but that it might do for *Godey's Lady's Book*; so to that magazine she sent it, rolled up tightly. Whether Miss Pryor or any other teacher inspected the addresses of the letters and parcels put into the mail-box she did not know, but the girls were forbidden to go to the post-office, so into the school box she dropped it. If Miss Pryor noticed its going, or the receipt of an answer, she made no sign, though she may have felt some curiosity. But she trusted Isabel; and her respect for a girl's individuality was always carried far.

Weeks passed and expectation had grown dull when Isabel received a notification that her story had been accepted. But there was no accompanying check, and she had had golden visions of pecuniary returns. More weeks passed and she wrote a note of inquiry, to which came the reply that young writers were usually entirely satisfied to see their contributions in print without being paid for them. Irritated by a suspicion that the editor was taking advantage of her inexperience, she ordered the manuscript to be returned, to her subsequent lasting regret. For the rest of her time at school she abandoned authorship.

XVI

ONE wonders whether the girls of Isabel's generation really differed as much from their daughters as one fancies they did. Certainly they were too little addicted to outdoor sports, yet it was not altogether to their disadvantage that they sometimes found it possible, even in pleasant weather, to spend a holiday afternoon in reading aloud. They were not being educated with the scientific thoroughness which now prevails, and looked upon reading as a treat, quite unconnected with a serious study of Literature. They venerated intellect and talked any amount of nonsense, much interlarded with quotations, but what they sought was amusement, not Culture. At present Dickens was in the ascendant as a quotable author. Quite ignorant of life, and lacking in the admirable aplomb which characterizes their descendants, they had a million artless theories, which they discussed ardently, saying, when worsted in an argument: "I would rather be wrong than insolently right."

And yet, having lived through a four years' war—impressionable years for them—they knew something of suffering and heroism and devotion to an ideal. Added to this, they were under the influence of a woman of lofty standards, whose assumption that they were somewhat better than they knew themselves to be was a constant stimulus. In spite of a fair amount of schoolgirl silliness, their faces were turned to the heights, even though an unwary foot might sometimes slip to a humiliating fall.

On a certain rainy Saturday afternoon in late November, Isabel was sitting with a pair of her chosen friends; "all compact and comfortable," said Adelaide, and Helen

finished the quotation for her. The three were busy with the crude "fancy-work" of that period. Adelaide, a raven-haired, dark-eyed beauty, was embroidering a remarkable sofa-cushion in worsted cross-stitch, Helen was crocheting a headgear known as a mariposa, but which certainly bore no resemblance to a butterfly, and Isabel, who impartially hated all manner of handiwork, fancy or other, was drawing to the end of the immense undertaking of a large shawl, knitted of crimson wool in an intricate stitch. She had begun it in October, as a Christmas present for Aunt Eliza and had toiled faithfully in all her leisure time, ripping out to rectify mistakes and painfully reknitting, until at last it was a creditably well-made piece of work.

"Almost done!" she sighed, as she began a fresh row.

"Poor Isabel!" said Helen laughing. "Aunt Eliza ought to appreciate that shawl."

"I wish you had something to read aloud to us," said Isabel, her eyes glued to her work. "I can always do a lot while Miss Pryor is reading. When I don't talk I can count these horrid little threes and listen too."

Helen held her work off at arm's length and gazed at it out of dreamy blue eyes. "I think I'll put the blue in now," she said. "And oh, girls, don't you like to have Miss Pryor tell us what she thinks about a book? It makes you see things. I can see now how George Eliot never gets away from the idea of Nemesis. According to her, every least little thing that you do wrong you have to pay for in full."

"What about the wicked flourishing like a green bay tree?" asked Isabel.

"Well," returned Helen, "I suppose they pay sometime. Only George Eliot would make you pay now—without letting you off hereafter."

"If only there weren't any rules," said Adelaide reflectively.

"Then you'd have your own," retorted Isabel. "And they'd very likely be a lot harder to keep. There are

advantages in being a Roman Catholic. Confession and absolution—and you begin all over again.”

This remark met with disapproval, ultra-protestantism being the order of that day.

“And your father a Presbyterian minister!” cried Helen reproachfully.

Isabel smiled, and having knitted to the end of her needle, held her work up to survey it to advantage. “I wouldn’t knit another for anything in the world,” she said wearily.

There was a horrid cracking sound and a chorus of dismay from the girls. Under the weight of the heavy fabric the wooden needle had broken in two.

“Quick! Let me take the stitches off for you on the other needle,” said Helen, and the work was confided to her skilful hands.

“I meant to finish it to-night,” Isabel said disgustedly. Then she jumped up from her chair. “I’ll ask Miss Pryor to let me go to Bowles’s for another pair of needles. I got these there.”

“It’s almost dark. Hurry, or she won’t let you.”

Isabel raced downstairs to Miss Pryor’s room and made her request. Miss Pryor glanced out of the window at the darkening sky and the steady rain.

“No,” she said. “It is too late. You must wait until Monday.”

No one ever ventured to reiterate a request. Isabel went away outwardly respectful and inwardly rebellious. She had vowed to finish the shawl that evening. It was perfectly unreasonable to refuse. When the lust of finishing got hold of her she was not to be thwarted. In the heat of indignation she went to her room for her purse, and then downstairs. In the storm-porch there were sure to be a few waterproof cloaks and umbrellas, left there to dry. She helped herself, pulled the hood of the cloak over her head, and ran all the way to Bowles’s store. It was not far, and she met no one on the way. Bowles sold her the needles and she ran back, her heart beating fast. When she came in, a maid was lighting the

lamps downstairs, a couple of girls sitting on the hall sofa glanced at her carelessly, and she walked quietly to her room and put the knitting needles in a drawer.

There was no reading aloud on Saturday evening, so she took her work up into the Third Hall and sat there alone, finishing her shawl. The other girls were downstairs dancing. Bound by that old promise to her father, Isabel could not dance, and longed for it so much that she hated to look on, so they were accustomed to her absence. While she worked, reflection set in and when, her task finished, she went down to prayers, she was more acutely unhappy than she had ever been since she came, a child of twelve, to the school. She was overwhelmed by the enormity of her sin. Miss Pryor had always trusted her, and she had failed to live up to the trust.

During the restless hours of a wakeful night she sought for some way of atonement. At last she resolved to go to Miss Pryor in the morning and make confession and ask forgiveness. It would be hard, and very likely in the future, instead of Miss Pryor's overestimate, she would have to be content to be rated at even less than her deserts. But she would regain her self-respect, and that was what mattered most. On that she was falling asleep, when a sudden question struck her and she sat up in bed. Did her self-respect matter more than anything else?

For she remembered the time, last year, when in one of her Saturday morning talks, Miss Pryor had told them of a letter she had received from a former pupil, one of those, she told them, whom she had trusted most. The letter contained a confession of sins of disloyalty and deception, committed while the writer was at school. She could not, she declared, rest any longer with them on her conscience, so she had relieved her mind, at the cost, as it turned out, of the peace of mind of the revered teacher. For Miss Pryor was evidently greatly distressed by the revelation. It made her feel, she told her girls, that she hardly knew whom she could trust; and she ended her brief talk on honor and loyalty with a pathetic—"I wish she had not told me."

"I was bad enough when I did the thing," said Isabel to herself, "but I'd be worse if I went and told Miss Pryor."

However, expiation in some form there must be, and she spent the rest of the night, first in devising it and then in rebelling at her own device. Pale-cheeked and heavy-eyed, she went to breakfast in the morning. Aunt Eliza was worried and Miss Pryor, who always noticed a girl's looks, was solicitous. Confessing to a perfectly genuine headache, Isabel was excused from church and advised to lie down. She longed to bury her aching head in the pillows, but first she had work to do.

From the window she watched the girls and teachers on their way to church and then locked the door and took the precious shawl from its hiding-place. She sat down with it in her lap. How pretty was its gay warm crimson; just the color to suit Aunt Eliza. And how well she had done it—she who was so stupid at such work. She buried her face in its softness for a moment and then, picking out the thread at the spot where she had fastened it, she raveled it all out, methodically winding the wool in balls. This was her punishment; this, and the wearisome reknitting.

XVII

It had seemed to Isabel that schooldays were to go on indefinitely, but on her eighteenth birthday she began to look ahead a little anxiously. Many girls left school at eighteen, and she could hardly expect to stay there longer than another year. Aunt Eliza, more anxious than she, offered suggestions of teaching, a hope of a little place in the school, if Miss Pryor would permit, so that they could stay together. Isabel said impatiently that she didn't want to teach; she wanted to live! Aunt Eliza sighed, said she would think about it, and secretly wondered whether she could afford a year abroad. There the matter rested for the time, and before it could be seriously taken up again a great change came.

The day before school broke up for the summer Aunt Eliza was taken ill. Their trunks were packed, but she was unable to go. She said she would be able to leave in a day or two, but she did not get better. Isabel, assisted by the housekeeper, took care of her. Everything seemed strange and unreal in the big empty house, which had always been so full. Miss Pryor was very kind, taking her to drive when she could be spared and visiting the invalid many times a day.

Aunt Eliza did not get better. In a day or two Miss Pryor sent to the neighboring city for another doctor and at the end of the week William Stirling was summoned. Before he came, Aunt Eliza had a talk with Isabel.

"I am going to die," she said, "and I'm sorry. These last years have been my best ones. Always remember that you have made them so."

Isabel tried to speak, but before she could find her voice her aunt went on:

"I have always saved something, and my investments have been safe. I have left everything to you—in trust,

until you are older. It's safer. John Brenton will look out for it. There will be about six hundred a year."

Again Isabel tried to speak.

"Don't interrupt me!" said Aunt Eliza with some asperity. It was not altogether easy to talk. "I always keep some money on hand, and I've just been paid. Yesterday I got Miss Pryor to draw out a good sum. There's enough left there for expenses, and I want you to have this."

She put her hand under the pillow and drew out an envelope. "I'm very tired," she murmured, as if to herself. She lay with her eyes closed for a moment, collecting her strength. Then she opened them again and looked up at Isabel. "There's nothing," she said feebly, "that is quite so comforting as to have money in your pocket. Don't spend this till you have to. Don't tell anyone you have it. Promise me!" She waited, her eyes holding Isabel's.

"Of course, I promise," said Isabel, holding back her sobs.

Aunt Eliza closed her eyes again. "I hope William will let you come back here," she murmured. "I'll ask him."

Once more she opened her eyes. "I suppose I ought to say other things," she said. "But I know you'll be a good girl. As to religion—I don't know much." A smile flickered across her face. "I'm going to find out."

When William Stirling came she was beyond speech.

The strange day of preparation for the journey home was mostly spent by Isabel in Miss Pryor's room, surrounded by the tenderest care. She divined instinctively that Miss Pryor was herself overwhelmed by the mystery of death and she wondered at it, for she had been used to such certainty of tone among religious people, but it seemed to bring them nearer together than anything else could have done. Miss Pryor was deeply religious, but it seemed that she had to brace herself strongly against the bulwark of faith to confront the unknowableness of what existed on the other side of the wall.

To Isabel, herself, the horror of death was its awful

finality; its relentlessness, which allows no second chance to show one's love. Her conscience reproached her with sins of thoughtlessness and indifference. In the night her mind went back over every incident of those days of her aunt's illness, every minutest detail of the final scene. And her flesh shuddered. Instead of being dulled by grief and shock, her perceptions seemed sharpened, her brain more alive than ever before. When alone with Miss Pryor, instead of weeping, she talked—talked endlessly and with an extraordinary keenness of thought and command of language. Miss Pryor, guarding and listening, understood the girl as she had never done before. But with her father, Isabel was silent.

William Stirling conducted himself with admirable dignity and self-control; listened to all that Miss Pryor had to tell him, and thanked her for her care of his sister and his daughter. Only when, in her yearning over the girl, she said she hoped he would let her have Isabel back again, he declined to commit himself. And then, the necessary delays over, the good-byes said, he and Isabel went to bury Aunt Eliza beside Grandma.

PART TWO

XVIII

It was to a greatly changed village that Isabel came back. Not only had Ptolemy lived through the Civil War, with its suffering and loss and its compensating enlargement of mind; it had found within its borders a public-spirited benefactor who had, by his latest enterprise, put it in touch with the world.

A plain man, Simeon Farrell by name, an inventor and an idealist, had had a vision of bringing education within reach of the poor man and adapting it to the needs of the plain workingman. And he had decreed that his university should belong to no church or sect. So the sectarians called it a "godless" institution, the heads of older universities scoffed at its methods, and the cultivated world in general asked derisively, "Can one take Farrell University seriously?" The future was to prove them wrong.

Meantime, little cared the Ptolemites for these attacks. It was an exciting experience to have a university with a number of professors and several hundred students dropped down on the village, as it were, out of the blue. For they had not troubled themselves very much over the preliminaries, scarcely knew, indeed, of the difficulties over the land-grant and the struggle to wring the charter from an unfriendly legislature. The community only woke up when the date of the Opening was actually fixed. On that gala day they flocked to hear the speeches and gaze at the distinguished personages. They filled the hall in the morning and footed it up the hill to the Campus

in the afternoon—a campus which was as yet little more than a corn-field. In the evening they attended the reception in the same hall which had witnessed the ceremonies of the morning. The benches had been removed and the floor swept and the company paraded solemnly around in an unbroken procession, talking of the day's doings and vastly occupied with the celebrities who were present.

To most of the people the college professor was an unknown species and regarded with deep respect. In addition to his preëminence in learning he was expected—heaven save the mark!—to set a smarter pace in customs and manners. As was to be anticipated, the greatest excitement was among the women. They realized suddenly that life had been very dull hitherto. Now there would be new people to know, lectures to attend, “culture” to be had for the asking; and, for the girls, beaux enough to go around.

The ministers of some of the churches were so far infected with the excitement that they got into the way of preaching sermons abounding in classical quotations and scientific allusions. Not so the Reverend William Stirling. He had from the first been one of the bitterest opponents of the “godless” university, and had done what in him lay, both in public and private, to prevent its existence. People still talked about the sermon which he had preached from the text, “He will not be slack to him that hateth Him, He will repay him to his face”; in which they thought they could detect personal allusions, though in that they were mistaken, at least so far as the intent went.

William Stirling had by this time been made a Doctor of Divinity, while his next-door neighbor had been elevated to the bench. Judge Gifford was a trustee of the university, and his son Edmund, who was soon to return from two years of European study and travel, had been appointed an assistant professor; a combination of circumstances which proved such a serious strain on the neighborly friendliness which had for many years sub-

sisted between Judge Gifford and his pastor that the former was threatening to go to another church, and was only lingering from force of inertia—a force which mostly kept him at home of a Sunday.

Surprisingly enough, another charter member of the board of trustees was Dr. Stirling's old enemy, Peter Malden, formerly of Malden's tavern. Some years earlier Peter had gone prospecting in the oil fields of Pennsylvania and had "struck oil," so that he came home a rich man. On his return he sold his tavern, bought the old Lansing house, which happened just then to be in the market, and took a pew in the Episcopal church. There he was to be seen every Sunday, clothed in broadcloth and fine linen, with his daughter Cassie (except during the time when she was away at the city boarding-school to which he sent her), and his sister-in-law, the "Aunt Mary" of Isabel's childish recollection. As for his son Dick, the freckled boy of whom Isabel had had a brief glimpse, he had graduated from West Point and was stationed in the Far West. His father and Cassie were very proud of Dick.

As Mr. Malden proved himself a generous giver both in the church and out of it, his name was soon in demand to head subscription lists; and as he was an enthusiastic supporter of the dominant political party, it was not long before he was sent to the State legislature, where he did yeoman's service in helping to get the charter for the university.

Now that, after Dr. Stirling's unsuccessful opposition, the university was actually started and going on under his very nose, he held aloof from it in every way, much to his wife's regret. Indeed, Lydia was half-inclined to wonder whether she had not been a little hasty in yielding to William's wooing. Life seemed to offer more now than it had done at that time. However, the too frequent recurrence of her birthday and the recollection of six years of married importance went far to reconcile her to being a little out of things now; that, and the firm determination to be well in the centre of affairs within a

reasonable space of time. Meantime, her sister-in-law's death, just before the first Commencement, would, in any case, have prevented her from participating in the festivities of the occasion. In her pious way, Lydia thought that the Lord had timed things very well.

XIX

AT eighteen, one does not forget, but one rebounds. Isabel still grieved and still regretted, but sooner than she would have believed possible, she found herself thrilling with the excitement of a new adventure. For to be "out of school" and "a young lady" mattered so immensely. One felt quite justified in considering oneself, for the time being, the centre of one's universe. She fancied that life in the parsonage would now be to her an altogether different affair from what it had ever been before. To her thinking, her footing in the family would be that of an equal—ready, of course, to treat her elders with respect, but no longer in a state of tutelage. The knowledge of her financial independence added no little to this feeling, and from the bottom of her heart she thanked Aunt Eliza for it.

Added to all this was still another interest. For, in the tenderness of her grief and the poignancy of her regret over affectionate and dutiful deeds left undone, she had made many good resolutions, chief among them being the determination to win her father's affection. Not that she knew exactly how to go about it, her father being singularly unresponsive to affectionate advances, but surely she, who without an effort had won school-mates and teachers, was not going to fail with her own father. For a time it was interesting to make the effort.

As a matter of fact, however, William Stirling was even more unapproachable than in her childhood. Of late years he had found in certain intellectual pursuits a refuge from disappointment in the results of his ministerial work and from a growing weariness of Lydia's conversation. He was devoting himself to those studies with ever-increasing absorption. He found in the work

of a student a satisfaction of mind and an assuagement of spirit which nothing else yielded him; and his only regret was that he had begun his scholarly activities so late. While conscientiously endeavoring to leave nothing of his pastoral duty undone, he was striving to make up for lost time, rising early and going to bed late. Lydia complained that she saw nothing of him any more.

Lydia had greeted Isabel with an impressive tenderness which conceded her claim to consideration as a bereaved person; a tenderness which was even more pronounced when the terms of Aunt Eliza's will and the amount of her property became known. For the stepmother had had her own anxieties regarding the advent of a grown-up daughter to claim a share in an income which was now pleasantly apportioned to the needs of two persons and to the charities which, as she knew, William would not allow to be curtailed. With Isabel so well taken care of, Lydia addressed herself to the delightful task of arranging the young girl's wardrobe; for next to the joy of choosing her own clothes came the pleasure of performing the like service for another person—always, be it understood, with that other person's money. And Isabel, who in matters of dress, had great respect for her stepmother, gladly accepted her assistance and, over the details of a simple mourning outfit, was drawn into a fairly cordial relation with her. Meantime, Lydia began to find that the title of "Mother" was not quite to her taste.

"It does seem ridiculous, doesn't it," she said one day, "for me to pose as having a grown-up daughter. Why, you are more like my dear little sister. Suppose you call me Lydia, dear. Wouldn't you like that?"

Isabel, who was the taller by several inches, looked down at her out of her intent eyes. In spite of their present amiable relations, her stepmother struck her anew as a very absurd person. But the idea wasn't a bad one. "Yes, I believe I would," she said.

"That's right," said Lydia, holding on to the note of vivacity, although inexplicably disconcerted by Isabel's

candid gaze. "We'll be just the dearest friends and you'll tell me all your little secrets."

Isabel smiled. "But I haven't any."

"Not yet, not yet," returned Lydia archly. "But the time will come—and I'll always be ready to hear them."

While awaiting the period of interesting confidences, Lydia encouraged the girl in such diversions as she deemed that her mourning would permit. All the friends of her childhood came to see her. Young girls filled the parsonage parlor or sat on the porch, chattering their nonsense. Young men were scarce in the summer vacation, but sometimes one or another came, brought by the girls. Isabel did not get on particularly well with them. She had very little of the coquette in her composition and she had had no training in the social amenities. She found the boys uninteresting and wasted no pains on them. And yet, in the depths of her heart, she was longing for romance.

As of old, Jessie was the friend of her heart; Jessie, with her lovely big brown eyes and her perfectly reliable sympathy. Jessie was calm, a bit lazy perhaps, but she was always ready for you when you wanted her and she always understood. The Giffords' house became, as in the old days, a home to Isabel, a place where she was petted to her heart's content and where she could always be quite herself.

It was at the Giffords' that she first heard Cassie Malden mentioned. The name at once aroused her to the liveliest interest. She had never forgotten the escapade of her childhood; and the big room full of toys, with the cat lying in the sun, seemed to her like a far-off, enchanted place. In the reticent atmosphere of the parsonage she had never, as a child, heard of her father's long warfare with Peter Malden of the tavern, nor had she yet learned of his stern disapproval of Peter Malden, capitalist and philanthropist. Jessie, however, was very conscious of these things.

"Why—haven't you heard of her?" she asked, in reply to Isabel's eager questions. "They lived over on South

Hill until Mr. Malden 'struck oil' and made his fortune. Now they have bought the old Lansing house and fixed it up. Cassie was at boarding school in New York until lately."

"Has she got an Aunt Mary?" asked Isabel.

"Yes, her Aunt Mary brought her up."

Isabel's cheeks were pink with excitement. "Oh, I'd so love to see Aunt Mary again!" she exclaimed.

"But how—" began Jessie, and stopped.

Judge Gifford laid down his paper and looked interested, and Mrs. Gifford made no feint of concealing her curiosity.

Isabel laughed. "I never told you half the naughty things I did when I was little, Jessie," she said; and went on to describe the escapade. "I'd just love to see Cassie and Aunt Mary," she finished.

Judge Gifford and his wife exchanged glances. It was not likely that Dr. Stirling's daughter would be allowed to see much of the Maldens. However, she was bound to meet them, sooner or later, and it was at the Giffords' house that it happened; and she and Cassie took to each other at once, just as they had done a dozen years before.

Cassie was not handsome, in spite of the fact that she wore beautiful clothes and knew how to put them on, but her broad merry face was irresistibly attractive. Although her admission to Ptolemy society was due in the first instance to her father's newly acquired position as a man of wealth and public spirit, her popularity was her own affair. In addition, she had gained in her city school more knowledge of the world and more finish of manner than most of the Ptolemy girls could boast.

"Do come to see me," said Isabel at parting. "You know I paid the last visit—and what a good time I did have! I want so much to see your Aunt Mary."

Cassie smiled, wondering whether Isabel really didn't know what an unwelcome guest any Malden would be at the parsonage. "Aunt Mary is going to be married pretty soon," she said.

"Married?" Isabel always felt surprised when she heard of middle-aged people marrying.

"Yes. She would have been married years ago if it hadn't been for us. She never told anyone a word about it, but just stayed and took care of us. But he waited for her." Cassie's blue eyes softened as she spoke. They were nice, frank, honest blue eyes.

"How lovely!" cried Isabel. "I'd know she'd do that. I want to see her more than ever."

"She'd love to see you," returned Cassie. And there the affair rested for a time.

Meanwhile, Isabel didn't mention the matter when she got home, partly because of the unpleasant associations of that childish visit, partly because she instinctively felt that the atmosphere of the parsonage would not, even now, be favorable to the Maldens.

XX

AUGUST had come, with its hot, shortening days. The early roses were past, but Grandma's garden was gay with geraniums and verbenas, and sweet with mignonette and heliotrope. Encouraged by Lydia, Isabel went out of a morning and cut flowers to fill the vases, that being the eminently proper task of the young lady of the house. The little gate was much in requisition in these days. From the attic Isabel brought some discarded chairs and a settee and in the old spot of their childish play arranged a retreat sacred to herself and Jessie. Lydia never disturbed them there. The rickety steps did not invite her clean muslin gowns and high-heeled slippers, and the out-of-door light was merciless to her complexion.

The two girls talked endlessly. Each had to relate the experiences of the years of separation; and, since such is the way of girls, they reverted from time to time to the everlasting theme. To the present generation their ideas would seem incredibly unsophisticated, not to say priggish. Isabel now discoursed as gravely and as innocently of possible love and marriage as she had formerly expatiated on predestination and infant baptism. She and Jessie were quite agreed as to the sinfulness of mere flirtation, though differing somewhat as to the possibility of controlling all situations.

"A girl ought never to let a man propose unless she is going to accept him," pronounced Isabel from the depths of her inexperience. "It is always possible to avoid it."

"I don't know," objected Jessie, with a recollection of a surprisingly sudden avowal to which she had been obliged to listen only a couple of months before. "I

don't think a girl can always help it." She sighed, for in her heart there had been some regret for a too hasty dismissal of young Ralph Everett. Then she laughed. "Lily Brainard says it's good for them to speak out and get it off their minds. And before she goes down to the parlor to see her visitors she always puts cologne on her hands, for she says there's no knowing when they'll grab a hand and kiss it."

"Oh, Lily Brainard! She's common, don't you think? But I must say, when I used to sit next her at the Academy, I'd never have thought she could grow up so pretty."

"I think she's pretty because she's so determined to be. She brushes that pale hair of hers until she has made it shine, and she is as white as milk because she never goes out in the sun or wind without being all swathed up. And she dresses beautifully."

"Even Lydia admires the way she dresses," said Isabel. "And *she's* critical. But Cassie Malden dresses just as well and is so much nicer. Jessie, why do you suppose she doesn't come to see me?"

It was a question which was troubling Isabel and she was inclined to be a little hurt as days passed into weeks and still Cassie did not come. And then one day there came a note, inviting her to a picnic. That was the way in which Cassie had decided to cut the knot.

Isabel, knowing of no reason for declining the invitation, wrote a prompt acceptance. That she should do this on her own responsibility was in accordance with her idea of a young lady, out of school. Moreover, in the Ptolemy of those days, all the young people were allowed a good deal of freedom. It was a consideration of another sort which sent her to consult her stepmother before sending her note.

"Do you think it would be too soon?" she asked wistfully.

Lydia gave her a keen glance. Could it be possible that the girl knew of no other reason than her mourning for refusing? However, so much the better. Now that

the Maldens had become important people Lydia found the old feud very tiresome.

"I don't think Aunt Eliza would have wanted you to give up all pleasures on her account," she said sweetly. "You have accepted it already, haven't you?" She was not unaware of the note in Isabel's hand, but chose not to know that it was still unsent. Thus would she save her credit if William should find out.

William, however, remained in ignorance, for Isabel found no encouragement to talk to him of her doings and, by good luck, Cassie called for her at an hour when he was out making parochial visits.

Isabel little suspected the trepidation with which her friend drove up to the parsonage. For Cassie did not think it probable that Dr. Stirling knew of the expedition. It was not in keeping with what the Maldens knew of him that he should accept an olive branch. Peter Malden had consented cheerfully when she asked him if she might invite the parson's daughter.

"But she won't come," he said, "unless she does it on the sly. Are you going to pick her up at the Giffords'?"

"I'm not going to do anything on the sly," said Cassie. "If she says she'll come, I'm going right up to the door to get her. I can only hope that her father won't come out and make it unpleasant."

So up to the door she came, with a brave clatter of horses' hoofs and jingle of smart harness. Lydia, considering discretion to be the better part for herself, kept out of the way. She would have liked to go to the door and show herself friendly, but William must be considered.

And so Isabel, shy but ecstatic, found herself sitting beside Lansing Fordyce on the middle seat of the Malden's three-seated "democrat." In front of her was Aunt Mary, self-sacrificingly pairing off with the coachman, with whom however, she, from time to time, indulged in friendly conversation. On the back seat was Cassie, who had chosen for her companion Joe Glover, one of the beaux of Ptolemy.

It was not altogether from generosity that Cassie put Isabel beside Lansing Fordyce, the young man whose acquaintance she had made while visiting a schoolmate in New York, and who had now come, ostensibly to visit his native village. He was stopping at the hotel, but spent most of his time at her father's house, which had once been his grandfather's. She thought he was inclined to take his welcome too much for granted.

Fordyce was a descendant of the old Lansing family of Ptolemy; a family who had gone downhill financially, while still thinking much of themselves socially. He was trying to establish a law practice in New York and intended to restore the family prestige in his own person. He meant to climb and to climb high; and had visions of the Supreme Bench. It was hinted among his friends that he would not be averse to a rich marriage provided he could find a wife who, while well-dowered, would be pleasing. In point of fact, he had always held that a man would climb better unhampered; but he was tempted by an alliance which indubitably would speed his way up to the heights. Not only was Cassie well-dowered and distinctly pleasing, but Peter Malden, besides his solid financial standing, happened to be in a position to help an ambitious young lawyer along in his profession. The affair seemed worth pursuing.

Fordyce had found himself fairly well amused by the diversions of a country town as long as they were enlivened by Cassie's running commentary and was feeling more and more certain that a continuation of Cassie's commentary would make a life with her more amusing than a life lived alone. He was therefore annoyed with her for putting him off with a bread-and-butter miss for a long drive. He felt that he was going to be bored.

Isabel blushed beautifully when he helped her into the wagon, but her response to the introduction had a certain self-conscious awkwardness. She had moments of being painfully aware of her lack of social experience. It was Aunt Mary who put her at her ease—Aunt Mary, turning around from the front seat to greet her. Isabel leaned

forward eagerly and, on the impulse of the moment, kissed the soft cheek.

"I've never forgotten you!" she cried.

The older woman's face flushed with pleasure. "Nor I you. You were a little darling."

Aunt Mary had a sweet face and childlike eyes, and even Fordyce, who found her speech and accent a little crude, had to admit that she was a dear.

Isabel leaned back, sighing with satisfaction at the meeting; intensely conscious, too, of the young man beside her. For was he not the outward and visible sign that she had at last emerged from childhood? Did he not represent Life, the World, all those things concerning which she was so vividly interested. She recognized instantly a difference between him and the boys of whom she had been so scornful. When he had alighted from the carriage and stood waiting for her as she came down from the porch, she had taken in his whole appearance; his height, his slenderness, his erect carriage and well-fitting clothes, his thin face with its deep-set dark eyes, his well-shaped mouth and aquiline nose and firm chin—surely this was the stuff out of which a romantic hero might be made. After some moments, during which conversation had been difficult, she wished to reassure herself on that point. Forgetting her embarrassment, she raised her eyes to look at him with a grave, considering gaze, the naïve scrutiny of a child. "Now what the deuce does she mean by that?" said Fordyce to himself, as he met her look. He was unused to such unsophistication and also unused to just that kind of searching regard.

Still irritated at Cassie, and feeling now a certain faint curiosity and amusement, he undertook to draw Miss Innocence out, stimulated, it might be, by such fugitive glimpses of smiling lips and shining but mysterious eyes as a broad-brimmed hat permitted him. The hat was provocative. It had a tantalizing way of throwing into sudden eclipse all but the tip of a pink ear, or the curve of a softly rounded chin. Under its shadow Isabel was

palpitating delightfully, although vexed at her inability to converse worthily. Gone were the flashes of wit which scintillated in the imaginary conversations of her daydreams, for, as she was learning, real conversations don't run along the lines of imaginary ones. She had yet to learn that mere mortal man is well content to hear his own voice while feasting his eyes on a beauty which beams in more or less intelligent response to that voice. From the back seat Cassie looked on at their absorption with some humor. Cassie was very broad-minded for a mere girl. . . .

Late that night Aunt Mary went into Cassie's room. The girl was sitting up in bed reading.

"Why did you do it?" asked the aunt, sitting down on the bed.

Cassie looked up from her book. "Do what?"

"Why, put Mr. Fordyce with Isabel and let them flirt like that. Neither of them looked at another person the whole time. And you know he came here on your account."

Cassie laid the book down. "He has never said a word of the sort, Aunt Mary. And suppose he did? His motives may have been mixed."

"Oh, Cassie!"

"Dear auntie! *Must* I marry the first man who comes along? I think Pappy needs me a little—especially now that you are going to leave us. And I do assure you, it's all right. My heart hasn't even got a crack in it. It's as whole as ever." She put her arm around her aunt's neck. "Go to bed, you old dear. You think we must all be in love because you are. Oh, you dear!" She drew Aunt Mary's face down to her own. "It was wicked—wicked—for you to give up all your young years to us—and never to let us know."

They kissed each other good-night and Aunt Mary left the room, only half satisfied. "Whatever we do," sighed Cassie to herself, "we cannot give her back those years." And then—"I wonder whether I shall ever care for anybody quite as much as Aunt Mary cares for her preacher."

Then she picked up her book and tried to be interested in it.

But Isabel, after the intoxicating experience of several hours spent in the society of an agreeable man who apparently had no eyes or ears but for her—unsophisticated Isabel lay for hours with wide-open eyes and burning cheeks. Life, it seemed, was beginning. Life, and perhaps love. How she longed for that adventure!

XXI

FORDYCE had been somewhat spoiled by women and did not look for difficulties. Cassie's unexpected elusiveness, so different from her former frank comradeship, annoyed and even bored him. He still wished to marry her, but permitted himself to diverge for the moment from the path of his intention into a byway of amusement. Presently the amusement became absorbing.

Aside from the fact that Isabel was so extraordinarily good to look at, she piqued his curiosity. Was she or was she not as naïve as she appeared? There were moments when he thought her only a prudish child, other moments when he thought her a coquette, as when, afraid to meet his eyes, she showed him the beauty of her dark lashes. If she had been stupid he would soon have decided that the puzzle was not worth solving, but she was far from stupid. And then the sheer beauty of her! It blossomed marvelously from day to day, almost from hour to hour, before his eyes. Within three days he had thrown caution behind him; before a week was over he had effectively barred his way to any further wooing of Cassie Malden; by the end of a fortnight he found that he must either run away from temptation or succumb to it.

As for Isabel, she went headlong into the adventure. Her code of honor would have forbidden her to play with affections which were preëmpted, but she had heard no gossip and had not a qualm. She took it all quite seriously, believed it a case of love at first sight on both sides and gloried in the romance of it. How wonderful it was! She so romantically, delightfully young, and already in love and beloved! How interesting life was

—how absorbingly interesting was Isabel Stirling to herself!

And yet, unsophisticated as she was, she was saved from self-betrayal by the deep instinct of reserve which underlay her superficial frankness. Moreover, in her, while the spirit was awake and alert, the senses were still slumbering. She was enclosed in a prickly hedge of dislike for physical contact; and the greater the commotion in her soul, the more quickly did she draw back into maiden fastnesses. When Fordyce shook hands with her, she withdrew her hand quickly. She did not like him to come too near to her. Perhaps it was not strange that he failed to see how complete was his conquest.

Of course Ptolemy talked. There was indeed, quite a buzz of excitement over the affair and much surmise as to how Dr. Stirling would take it if it should really prove to be serious. Lydia, much pleased with Isabel's conquest, as she termed it to herself, made the way of the young people easy. It was only William Stirling who remained unconscious. In fact, one evening he came into the parlor and assumed that the young man's visit was intended for himself. In vain Lydia manœuvred to get him out of the room.

As a matter of fact, the two men met in a friendly way. Fordyce rather admired the redoubtable parson as a fine specimen of a certain type; for William Stirling, when he chose to be friendly, was not without his attraction. On this occasion he did so choose. His mother and the young man's grandmother had been friends in the old days. He accepted the visit as an act of respect to himself and found pleasure in a conversation which, while safely neutral, refreshed a mind grown weary of its groove.

"I admire your father extremely," said Fordyce to Isabel next day.

He could not have pleased her better, for still, as in her childhood, her heart, always a little sore where her father was concerned, took solace in the comfort offered to her pride.

"I like so much to have you say that," she replied, but there was a wistfulness in her smile which gave his heart a curious twist.

She was sitting on the rustic bench under the apple-tree, while he sat a little apart, on the lowest of the shaky old steps. He got up and came and sat beside her and her quick, unconscious movement to leave a space between them was so characteristic that it amused him. He smiled, looking down at her with the glance which always made her heart beat quicker.

Neither of them spoke for a moment. Fordyce, after some hours of reflection overnight, had made up his mind to flee from temptation. He had forced himself to consider his career, in which the minister's daughter could hardly help him. He told himself that he must climb unhampered, even if he had to climb unhelped. But he was annoyed that it should cost him an effort to announce his approaching departure. At last he said, in a casual tone:

"My vacation is over. I have to go back to town to-morrow."

Isabel made a startled exclamation. She flushed and then paled. "Why, I thought—" she began, and stopped.

"Yes, I hoped to stay another week, but business has come up unexpectedly."

Isabel sighed, looked at the ground for a moment, then lifted unclouded eyes to his. It was dreadfully sad to have him go, but he would be coming back. She never dreamed of distrusting him, and that he had as yet said no actual word of love did not make the least difference. She pulled herself together courageously.

"Well, it isn't to-day," she said, with a little laugh.

Fordyce was at once relieved and piqued. Certainly, he didn't want her to care too much, yet she might have cared a little—since he was finding it so hard to leave her. However, as it seemed that he had only himself to reckon with, he could enjoy his last day with a clear conscience.

"I'm sorry about that camp-meeting expedition to-night," he said abruptly. "Rather a bore, I'm afraid."

But in her own mind Isabel thought it would be a better way of spending the evening than to stay in the parlor at home, with Father coming in and taking the visit to himself—glad as she was to have him appreciated. It was an excursion which had been arranged some days before. They were all to have an early tea at the Giffords', to allow time for the ten-mile drive, and Isabel was to return there for the night. And there would be the long evening in each other's company. No one thought, by this time, of any other arrangement of a party. Oh, there were hours and hours yet—and who could tell? She quaked deliciously, and was willing to put off the superlative moment, never doubting that it would come.

XXII

It was still daylight when they started on their drive, Fordyce and Isabel side by side on the back seat of the surrey which followed the Maldens's democrat, but it was quite dark when they arrived at their destination. Guided by the fitful light of fires and torches, the laughing, chattering party threaded their way through the trees and past rows of slightly built shanties which had been put up for the accommodation of those persons who were spending the week on the camp-meeting ground. Presently the fires flamed more brightly and they lowered their voices as they came to the edge of the cleared space set apart for the services; a space filled with long wooden benches and dominated by a high, roughly constructed platform of planks, lighted by blazing torches set at the four corners.

By daylight there could have been little that was impressive in the scene, but with the coming on of darkness all was changed. Set at intervals among the trees and forming a cordon around the assemblage of worshipers, were large, altar-like tables made of slabs of slate brought from the neighboring quarry and supported on pedestals of irregularly piled stones. On these altars the huge, fantastically twisted roots of giant trees were blazing, thrusting out from the flames tortured, protesting and strangely distorted limbs. Above them the thick foliage of the trees showed strangely white in the bright light. These uncanny fires gave an indescribable wildness to the scene. The stage seemed set for a heathen orgy, rather than for a scene of Christian worship. Overhead, the moon shone fitfully through scurrying clouds, while

beyond, the wavering firelight gave glimpses of mysterious depths of forest—a forest whose narrow boundaries could not be discerned in the obscurity.

Within the circle of fire sat the large congregation, row on row, on the hard wooden benches, and on the high platform facing them sat the ministers, visible in the light of the torches.

Isabel and Fordyce hung back for a moment and were at once separated from their companions.

"This is tremendous!" exclaimed Fordyce in a low tone. "I didn't suppose they had such a sense of the picturesque—or have they hit it by a happy accident?"

He drew her hand in his arm as they advanced a step or two. "The ground is uneven," he said. "Better let me help you."

"Wait!" she said, drawing her hand away.

The service had begun and the audience was just rising for the singing of a hymn. In a moment the old, familiar "Rock of Ages" rose in a great volume of sound which stirred the pulses. Isabel and Fordyce stood motionless until the singing had ceased.

Fordyce drew a long breath. "That was a thrill worth while," he began. "Not music exactly, but fine—that voice of a multitude singing in unison." Then, looking down at her face, with its unreserved and sensitive response to the emotion of the crowd, his own measured and sophisticated appreciation seemed banal. He forgot to be cautious.

"Come!" he said, and again taking her hand and laying it on his arm, he led her back into the shadow.

"But where?" asked Isabel, bringing herself back with an effort. "I thought——"

"You don't want a sermon, do you? Anything after that hymn would be anticlimax, it seems to me."

"We have lost the others." She was now clinging to his arm in a way quite unlike herself and was shivering with excitement.

"Are you cold?" he asked with surprise.

"No—oh, no. But the singing and those weird fires—

"I suppose it's the thrill." She broke off with a wavering little laugh.

"Come!" he said. "Don't let's look for the others just yet. Let's go and sit down somewhere."

He found a seat for her in a grassy spot under a tree and sat down beside her. Isabel gave a long, soft sigh of content. The night was warm and still except for an occasional puff of wind. Through the branches of the trees one got glimpses of a troubled sky and a moon that seemed to be flying through clouds. From the other side of the leaping fires came the droning voice of the preacher. A Biblical phrase came back to her memory and unconsciously she spoke half aloud. "In outer darkness," she said. Then she smiled to herself. What did darkness or light matter? And then a silence fell between them—a silence at the same time sweet and alarming; so alarming that she cast about for something to say, foolishly trying to put off what she was sure would be the most thrilling moment of her life.

"I'm afraid Father thought I was going to listen to the preaching," she said.

Fordyce smiled in the darkness. "You can't expect me to repent having enticed you away from it. Not but what I like to see a woman care for her religion."

"Oh, but that isn't it," said Isabel, who must be honest whether he approved or not. "The trouble with me has always been that I am not religious. I care, you know—but I can't."

"You care—but you can't." He spoke in the tender and amused tone which one uses to a child. "Do you know you are a delicious child—the oddest compound of pagan and puritan."

"I'm not a child," protested Isabel, half wounded. "I'm entirely grown up and nearly as tall as you are. And I can't remember the time when religion hasn't been a serious matter. I've never been able to feel as they say I ought, and all through my childhood I was almost frightened to death. That I'm not frightened now must be because I'm so much wickeder."

He laughed. "Your childhood doesn't sound exactly happy."

"No, I wasn't happy. I had no mother and my grandmother died. I thought nobody cared for me, except to save my soul and see that I didn't tear my clothes. And now lately I find that Aunt Eliza did care. If I had known it I might have been nicer to her, you know."

This was a side which she had not shown him before and there was something irresistibly pathetic in her artless account of her childhood. For a moment he had a glimpse of her as she did not know herself; the innocence and the courage; the seeking mind and the adventurous spirit; and the loneliness of a heart turned back on itself.

After all, he was but a man, and a young man. He did not attempt to reason with himself. She seemed to him just then the one thing in the world worth while and all his cautious, worldly-wise plans but rubbish, fit for the scrap-heap. He wanted her.

Yet at first he found no words to say. They sat silent and motionless, while in the distance the voice of the preacher droned on, and overhead, all unnoticed, the clouds grew blacker, the moon became invisible, and the wind blew strongly through the branches. Far in the distance, but coming nearer, the thunder rumbled.

"Isabel!" said Fordyce at last. In the darkness his hand reached for hers and closed over it. Her heart beat wildly—almost audibly. The excitement, the silence, the trembling expectation of what he was about to say, seemed more than she could bear. She felt that her fingers were betraying her, they were so cold and trembling, but she could not draw them away. Suddenly a vivid flash of lightning showed them each other's faces, pale, both of them, gazing wide-eyed at each other, off their guard in the darkness; seen in a flash, blotted out in an instant. Immediately came a tremendous crash of thunder. The very earth seemed to shake.

The great moment was past. Fordyce grasped her hand more strongly, a businesslike, masterful grip this

time. "Come!" he said, pulling her to her feet. "We must get out of this."

He hurried her along breathlessly, hardly knowing whither, but intent on getting away from the trees. "There may be a house where we can get shelter," he said.

The rain was now beginning to fall in big, separate, splashing drops. The lightning, flashing in lurid sheets, gave them glimpses of figures with outstretched hands and of faces with exclamatory mouths; and in the instant's flash all of these excited figures seemed to be standing stock-still in attitudes of mad haste. When Fordyce recalled the scene afterwards he thought of pictures of the Last Judgment. In the midst of it all, Isabel had a vanishing view of Aunt Mary's face, sweet with a sort of motherly concern.

There was, at first, a confused noise of shouts and exclamations, and then the rain came down in rushing torrents and no other sound could be heard but that and the crashing thunder. Fordyce hurried Isabel toward the road and, when she stumbled over a stone, he put his arm around her and rushed on with her. On his part the action was absolutely without sentiment, but the girl, who had been dashed from a delicious dream into a wild nightmare, passed now into a new phase of excitement. Thunder, lightning and rain became small matters. Intensely conscious of his touch, a new sense awoke within her and she thrilled in response to it. She was madly happy.

In another moment they had gained the shelter of a house by the roadside. Here all was confusion. A throng of bedraggled people huddled in the porch. Inside, the house was crowded with other refugees, their dripping garments leaving puddles on the floor, everybody talking at once—a wet babel. Amid this confusion Fordyce spied Aunt Mary and made his way to her.

"Will you look after Miss Stirling," he said, "while I go and see if I can find out what has become of the horses."

"We brought our coachman," replied Aunt Mary. "He will have looked out for them."

But he was gone and she turned to the girl. "Why, you poor child!" she exclaimed. "You are wet through and through."

"Am I?" said Isabel vaguely. She was quite unconscious of the fact as she looked at Aunt Mary with wide, bright eyes. In her face was a rapt, ecstatic look.

"My dear!" said Aunt Mary.

It was all like a dream to Isabel; the jostling, exclaiming crowd, the tray of hot coffee which was being carried about, the tall thin man in black who came up to them and reproved "Mary" for not coming in sooner.

"I had to see what I could do for those frightened people," said Aunt Mary apologetically.

"You never think of yourself," said the man tenderly.

Isabel scarcely heard the words, but was sensitive to the tenderness of the tone. Something in his voice roused an old memory. She looked up at him and knit her brow in a startled effort to remember. The old basement room in the Methodist church came back to her and the kind man who told her that God was like a father. Yes, it certainly was he. How strange everything was. . . .

They started for home at last, a somewhat silent party. Isabel, seated beside Fordyce, was in that state of beatitude which holds articulate thought in abeyance. Acutely conscious of his nearness, she had no desire that he should speak to her in the presence of others. She hardly heard what anyone said, only rousing herself to answer vaguely when someone chanced to ask her a direct question. Fordyce said little to her, but leaned forward from time to time and made some remark to Jessie and Joe Glover in front of them. For his part, whatever regrets might assail him in the future, his present feelings were divided between wonder at having lost his head so completely and thankfulness that the forces of nature had intervened to keep him from committing an egregious folly. That it would still be easy to commit that folly he fully realized, and resolved to give himself no further opportunity.

What he did not so fully realize was his cruelty. So much Isabel's aloofness had done for her.

At the Giffords' gate Fordyce helped her and Jessie to alight and went with them up the long walk to the door, calling back to ask Joe Glover to wait for him a moment. The fanlight above the door showed a dim light, but all the front windows were in darkness. In the back sitting-room Mrs. Gifford was waiting before an open fire, to cosset the two girls. Jessie, running ahead of the others, hastily turned the knob of the door, preparing to efface herself as quickly as might be.

"Good-night," she said, as she slipped through the half-open door.

"But it's good-bye," called Fordyce after her. "Aren't you going to tell me good-bye?"

"You really go by the early train?" said Jessie, lingering reluctantly.

"I really must," he replied, adding: "You've all been so good to me—everybody has—and it warms one's heart immensely to come back to the place where one was born."

Jessie refused to be kept. With a hasty: "Of course we shall see you again often—good-bye," she disappeared into the semi-darkness of the house.

Fordyce and Isabel faced each other. Her soul was in her eyes. The moment had come, and she was ready for it. But he did not see her eyes. He saw her only as a silhouette against the lesser darkness.

"Good-bye," he said. "I mustn't keep you out here. It has been so pleasant." Other words came to his lips. He repressed them. He had taken her hand in a light clasp. He dropped it quickly. The temptation was too great to be dallied with. "Good-bye," he said again.

"Good-bye," she faltered, dazed by the abruptness of his leave-taking and the dryness of his tone.

He pushed the door open for her, and she found herself within the hall, listening to his retreating footsteps.

XXIII

HARD as it was to accept the decree of an unbelievably cruel fate, there was a finality about that chilly leave-taking which forbade illusion. True, there were long hours when Isabel sat dreaming of the letter which she might receive by any mail; of the guest who might be ushered in with any ringing of the doorbell; of an ecstatic reunion where no explanations would be necessary. But she knew in her heart that there would be no such letter, no such reunion. There were wakeful hours in the night when she lay wondering whether the fault had been her own, and tingled with shame at the thought that she had perhaps made herself too cheap. Or perhaps, in her dread of self-betrayal, she had seemed too indifferent and he had thought she did not care.

But there was another mood which was of more service to her. Although, as yet, more perplexed by Fordyce than angry with him, she was bitterly angry with Fate, and entirely rebellious that anything so untoward should have happened to her. "For I am so young," she said to herself. "I haven't even begun yet."

She had stood, it seemed, at the entrance to a world of wonder and delight and had seen before her a vista of the joyous adventure which is the birthright of youth; and then, when, palpitating with excited anticipation, she had essayed a step forward, she had stumbled and fallen and had hurt herself so grievously that henceforth, as she feared, she must go through life with a sorry limp, her adventure ended before it had begun. "I will not, I will not!" she said. "It's inconceivable that I should have to be unhappy. I won't be made miserable!"

With intense determination and absolute self-absorp-

tion she set out to rescue herself from unhappiness. At first, indeed, there seemed little that she could do except to laugh and talk. She talked incessantly to Jessie, to Mrs. Gifford, to all the young people of her set, even to Lydia.

She was the more determined because there was her world to face. Everybody had been so excited over the affair and now people were making sly allusions, taking it for granted that she and Fordyce were engaged. But from that first moment, when cold and dazed, she stumbled into Mrs. Gifford's sitting-room, trying, even then, to hold up her head and act as if nothing were the matter, she was sure that Jessie and her mother understood. Sometimes she had a momentary longing to throw her arms around Mrs. Gifford's neck and sob her heart out on that motherly breast. Instead, she went on talking and laughing with a determined gayety.

It was Lydia who was the worst of all—Lydia, with her arch speculations as to when Mr. Fordyce would return, and her watchfulness of the mail. Dr. Stirling usually went to the post-office himself, and his wife was always ready to take the letters from his hand. She received but few herself, but Isabel's schoolmates wrote to her.

"Nothing important to-day," she would say, when her husband was out of hearing. "*Too* bad! But he'll write soon. Unless our little girl treated him badly."

"I don't know what you are talking about," Isabel would say, laughing with apparent carelessness.

"Tut, tut!" with a warning finger upraised. "Don't tell fibs!"

With all her curiosity, Lydia could not make out whether the girl really cared. As for Isabel, she hardly knew which she dreaded most, the ones who didn't understand, or those two dear souls who did. In her extremity she turned to her father, the only person about her who remained absolutely unconscious that there was anything which required understanding. He was not very responsive to her awkward efforts at conversation and

suffered, rather than encouraged her to accompany him on an occasional walk, but on the whole he was not displeased. If he had been less shut up in himself, or perhaps less awkwardly shy, or if Isabel had been less self-absorbed, they might now have come into some sort of normal relation; but William Stirling never did know how to get on with young people, his own daughter least of all, and Isabel was not thinking of her father, but of herself. Nevertheless, his very remoteness, the neutral character of his companionship, helped her somewhat. Unfortunately even this unsatisfactory solace was but short-lived.

Chancing to pass through the hall one morning, William Stirling came upon his daughter studying a slip of paper which she held in her hand—a cheque, as he immediately saw, noticing it because it was connected with a duty which he had upon his conscience to fulfil. In fact, it represented a quarter's income, with the addition of the trifling sum left over after the expenses connected with Aunt Eliza's illness and death had been paid. Dr. Brenton, the trustee of the little estate, had given himself the pleasure of leaving it with her, stopping at the door in his old buggy, as he passed on his round of morning visits. To John Brenton the mere sight of the girl was a pleasure.

When her father came upon her she was gazing at the cheque with a tender remembrance of Aunt Eliza and yet with a dimpling pleasure at being the possessor of so considerable a sum. She had been faithful to her promise and the three hundred dollars which her aunt had given into her hand had scarcely been touched, but now she could spend something. Nothing, since Fordyce went away, had so raised her spirits. At the sight of her father she started and involuntarily the hand holding the precious piece of paper dropped to her side. When he desired her to go with him to his study she obeyed uncomfortably, because he had never asked her there except for something unpleasant. What she now dreaded was a religious appeal, for which, she felt, it was about time.

He seated himself in his desk chair and she stood facing him, making, if he would have allowed himself to see it, a lovely picture against the dull background of timeworn furniture and shelves of leather-bound theological books. But he was intent on the matter in hand.

"What is the amount of your yearly income from your aunt?" was his unexpected beginning.

"About six hundred dollars," she replied readily.

"That puts it in your power to do a great deal of good."

"Yes, Father." She was half ashamed that hitherto she had thought only of herself in connection with this money.

"Have you thought about this and decided what proportion of your income you will give away?"

"Why—no. You see there will be such a lot of things that I want. But of course I don't want to be stingy."

"I don't think you will need so very much," he replied. "My house is your home. You don't need to save money, for at my death there will be a little for you and your mother. Of course I shall allow you to purchase your own clothes under her guidance, but there must be no foolish display of finery."

He paused, but Isabel did not at once reply. She was looking at him with an expression which he didn't quite like; as if he and she were on equal ground. She was, in fact, considering what his interference might mean.

"I might pay tithes," she said at last, "like the people in the Bible. That would be sixty dollars, and I'll give it to whatever you think best."

He had meant, in discussing the matter with her, to treat her with kindness and consideration and had expected appreciation and deference. Her independence irritated him. "You must give a great deal more than that," he said sharply. "Do you think that with all the need in the world I shall let you waste money on yourself?"

"But Father!" she exclaimed in dismay.

"I might perhaps hope," continued her father, "that in

doing some good your own heart would be turned to those matters of religion toward which you are so strangely indifferent."

Isabel sighed impatiently. If only he wouldn't preach!

He looked at her for a moment in vexed perplexity. Why was she so different from the children of his parishioners who were wont, on arriving at the proper age, to come into the fold. Her obduracy seemed to him a personal affront. Truly, his foe was of his own household. All the more need, then, for a strong hand.

"I see more than ever," he went on, "that you cannot be left to your own devices. I shall allow you twenty-five dollars a quarter for yourself. The rest you will turn over to me. In order that you may have some freedom of choice I shall give you a list of the objects which I consider most deserving. Among them you may choose. We shall avoid ostentation. When you have indicated the sum to be given in any direction I will make the donation in the name of an unknown friend."

Lydia, listening on the other side of the door, could hardly control her mirth at William's simplicity, even though her laughter was mixed with dismay. Isabel could see nothing but tragedy in the monstrous proposition.

"I can't possibly manage on a hundred dollars a year," she said breathlessly. "And Aunt Eliza didn't mean me to."

"Twenty-five dollars a quarter was what I always allowed your aunt for your clothes."

"But she gave me more. And I was only a little girl when you started it. And you don't know how expensive everything is now."

"I know that it is possible for you to be neatly and suitably dressed on a small sum. Take a lesson from your mother. She always looks properly dressed."

In the midst of her trouble Isabel laughed. To her father it seemed the last touch of insolence. "If you think—" she began.

On her sofa on the other side of the door Lydia

trembled. But Isabel checked herself. If Lydia had her secrets it was not for her to betray them. She gazed at her father with an appearance of calmness, although her heart was beating fast.

"Father, I cannot agree to it."

William Stirling could hardly believe his ears. "What do I hear you say?" he said sternly. "Never speak to me in that way again. You have been away from me too long. Now I wish you to endorse that cheque and give it to me."

Isabel's heart was beating more violently than ever, but she did not lower her eyes and she tightened her clasp of the cheque. "But I must pay for my things," she said.

"What things?"

"The mourning I wear for Aunt Eliza."

"Isn't it paid for? How did you get it?"

"Lydia bought the things for me." She used the name quite unconsciously—it came so much more easily than the other; but it seemed that he had not heard it before.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed.

"Why, she offered to lend me the money and said I could pay when mine came."

"Are you aware that you called your mother by her first name?"

"Why, she asked me to. She likes it better."

"It's indecent! You must have misunderstood her. Hereafter you will call her by her proper title."

"Yes, Father," said Isabel, gaining confidence as the subject of the discussion was shifted. "But I must pay her for my clothes. And I shall not have so very much left, for there was a good deal to get."

"Very well." He paused. He never interfered with his wife's money matters. It was a matter of pride. "Then this time I shall leave you to settle those affairs—but you are never to incur any more debts, or to impose on your mother's kindness."

Isabel pursued her advantage. "Besides that," she

said, "I want to get a stone for Aunt Eliza's grave. I don't know how much such things cost, but Grandma's and the others are very simple and this would want to be like them."

It was impossible to find fault with this pious wish and William Stirling only remonstrated to the extent of saying that such a duty would devolve on him.

"No," persisted Isabel. "Aunt Eliza left me her money. She—adopted me. I *want* to do it for her, Father."

Again impossible to find fault with her. "I will see about it," replied her father, somewhat ambiguously.

"Oh, thank you," said Isabel, taking his reply quite simply. "Of course I wanted you to see about it, for I don't know how."

Again that tone, as of equal to equal. William Stirling resented it, but found nothing to say to it. "Pay your mother for your clothes," he said stiffly. "And hereafter you will place your money in my hands, as I have directed you. Now you may go."

For the moment Isabel was the victor, but she felt no elation; only a bitter sense that no one in the world cared for her and that she must look out for herself. She cashed her cheque and paid her score, finding herself, as she had anticipated, with only a moderate amount left over; perhaps enough to pay for Aunt Eliza's headstone. Aunt Eliza's private gift was almost all that she would have to depend on if her father carried out his monstrous plan.

Lydia, who was almost as anxious as Isabel that so much good money should not be diverted to missionaries, ventured to give the girl a word of advice. It might easily be supposed that her husband had mentioned the matter to her.

"Can't you see, darling," she said, "that if you could only make up your mind to join the church, dear Father would have more confidence in you?"

"In what way?" asked Isabel, wondering whether

Lydia too, was going to talk to her about religion. That, she felt, would be more than she could bear.

"Why should it be so impossible?" pursued Lydia. "Surely that dear little head of yours doesn't harbor Doubts?" In those days any questionings of the accepted doctrines of Calvinism were alluded to as Doubts, with a very large D. "You are a little obstinate, I'm afraid. But if you could realize how different your dear father's attitude would be—how much more he would be willing to entrust to you——"

"How much more—what?"

"Why, he would treat you as a grown-up person. You could take care of your own money. I might help you about that——"

"Oh!" said Isabel. "I can't sell myself." A remark which Lydia did not soon forgive.

"Sell yourself!" she exclaimed in a tone of horror. "How you misunderstand me. Surely you ought to be able to unite with your father's church without such a thought as that."

"No, mother, I cannot," replied Isabel sadly enough.

"Mother!" mimicked Lydia reproachfully.

"Father doesn't wish me to call you Lydia."

"The dear father! He is so anxious that I should have all my dignities. Well, it will just have to be your little name for me when he isn't present to be disturbed by it."

This was Lydia's second mistake that morning. Isabel looked at her. "No," she said slowly. "If I can't say it in his presence I think I'd better not say it at all."

XXIV

ISABEL was homesick for her school. Since she could not go back there as a pupil, she wondered whether she knew enough to teach anything and even considered writing to Miss Pryor about it. Meantime, as she really did not feel proficient in any branch of knowledge, she thought she would like to study something—it didn't much matter what.

Most of the intellectually aspiring women of Ptolemy were going up the hill to university lectures. She would go too. Yet she wanted something more personal than lectures, a teacher who would be interested in her. Although she didn't quite know it, she wanted a teacher who would appreciate her cleverness.

Meantime, Mrs. Gifford was saying to herself: "I *must* find that poor child another beau. It's the only efficacious cure. I do wish she were allowed to dance. It's such good exercise and clears out the mind so."

With the opening of the fall term of the university and the inrush of students, it seemed that another beau would not be a difficult thing to find. The village was rousing itself to the activities of a university town. The streets were pervaded by young men; shop windows exhibited their newest wares in the way of neckties and other manly vanities—a modest display, for those students of the early days were few of them addicted to fine raiment. The girls of Ptolemy came out in all the glory of new fall hats; and the middle-aged women were again plodding up the hill to the campus with their note-books. For the moment, Isabel put off joining them.

Edmund Gifford was at home again, engaged in the duties of an assistant professor. Isabel had felt curious to see Edmund, the big brother toward whom she and Jessie had both felt so respectful when they were chil-

dren. Jessie worshiped him still; so did his mother; and his father, although pretending to criticize him from time to time, was almost as transparent in his affection and admiration.

At first sight, Isabel was disappointed. To a girl of nineteen, the outer man counts immensely. Her ideal was tall and slender. Edmund was a young man of medium height, rather short than tall, with a figure which, in its present plumpness, promised increasing weight. A luminous, straightforward glance and a fine breadth and fullness of brow gave distinction to a face which was not otherwise remarkable. The charm which he was universally conceded to possess lay perhaps in a combination of intellectual power and boyish whimsicality. He was equally ardent in the pursuit of amusement and the pursuit of knowledge; and as he amused himself in company and studied in solitude he was sometimes misjudged by the superficial. He liked people—a great many people, of many different sorts. When however, he happened not to like them, he took no pains to conceal his antipathy.

Isabel presently felt his charm and envied Jessie. Would that he had been her own brother! She was greatly entertained by him and entirely at her ease with him. She even said to Jessie one day that he was as good as a girl to have around. Jessie had the tact to refrain from repeating the remark.

Edmund, for his part, was much impressed by Isabel's beauty. "She is one of the people," he told his mother, "whose business is not to talk, but just to let you look at them."

"I think she'll have something to say for herself yet," said Mrs. Gifford.

"Doubtless—when she has lived a little longer. That will be lucky for her, for then she may not be so good to look at."

Meantime, the Giffords were getting ready for their annual "party." A joyous excitement pervaded the house and extended to the parsonage. In spite of her mourning

Isabel was to attend the party. Mrs. Gifford would not listen to a refusal and Lydia argued that in the case of a parishioner and next-door neighbor, they must put aside their own feelings and show themselves friendly. Even Dr. Stirling always showed himself at these festivities. There was to be no dancing, the crowd being too great, so that there would be nothing to offend his principles.

"What can I wear?" Isabel asked excitedly of Lydia. She had thought that her stepmother would be interested.

But Lydia, intent on her own preparations, did not offer any assistance. Her enthusiasm over the girl's clothes had waned since William had imposed such severe restrictions on the spending of money.

"Your black grenadine will do," she said.

A black grenadine for one's first party! And an old one at that.

"Can't I have Miss Ford come and make me a dress?" she asked wistfully.

"Your father wouldn't wish me to lend you money again," said Lydia. "It's too bad, but if you can't do what your father wishes, you will have to learn to do the best you can with what he allows you."

Isabel went up to her own room with head up and tightened lips. It seemed now as if she might spend a little of her secret fund, but when she thought it over there were difficulties. She was unwilling to let Lydia know that she had extra money to spend, since she had promised Aunt Eliza to keep the secret, and she could not have a dress made just now without telling Lydia how she had managed it. At any rate, she would first see what she could do.

Meantime, Jessie displayed her own new frock, a much ruched white tarletan, with its two or three thin under-petticoats. "What are you going to wear?" she asked.

"I think I'll have a white dress too," said Isabel.

She came home and got out the thin white India mull frock which Aunt Eliza had had made for the June festivities at the school. It did not billow so diaphanously

as Jessie's did, and where hers was cut so as to show her shoulders and arms, this came primly up to the throat and down to the wrists. Isabel held it up and looked at it and then laid it on the bed and searched in her box of treasures for the key of her mother's trunk. She had never yet looked into it, deterred, as a child of twelve, by a sort of awe, and later by forgetfulness. Now surely the time had come. She looked long at her mother's portrait and then went up into the attic, pulled the little old trunk out from under the eaves, and put the key in the lock. A moment she hesitated before raising the lid. Grandma, she thought, must have packed the things up after her mother died. She wondered whether anyone had touched them since.

There was not so very much there. Some narrow-skirted gowns of soft, pale tints, a few undergarments delicately trimmed with linen-cambric ruffles edged with fine lace, a half-finished baby's dress with a rusted needle sticking in it. Isabel picked that up and kissed it. At the bottom was a flat pasteboard box on which was written: "Lace which belonged to Bell's mother." How nice of Grandma to let her know that! She locked the trunk and carried the box down to her room, unopened.

For a time she held it on her lap and made no movement to open it. She could think of nothing but her young mother and the pathetic little trunk. At last, however, she untied the string and raised the cover of the box and then the sight of the fine old lace, yellowed, but clean, stirred her interest and hope. She lifted out the pieces, handling them delicately and reverently. In one corner was a tiny jeweler's box which, when opened, revealed a little old-fashioned pearl brooch; such a delightful treasure trove. Without delay she set herself to remodel the white mull gown.

XXV

THE good people of Ptolemy made a point of going late to parties. When invited at eight o'clock they considered that etiquette demanded that they should not appear before ten. The university people, on the other hand, arrived, mostly on foot, at about the hour specified, so that the rooms were well filled when the Stirlings arrived, Lydia clinging to her husband's arm, her face wreathed in smiles, her costume a chastened replica of the latest fashion plates. Being in mourning, she wore black, but its somebreness was relieved by a touch of glittering jet and a collar and barbe of point lace. Her sandy hair, somewhat assisted from outside sources, was coiled in massive braids of which not a hair was out of place. Behind her came Isabel in her white mull gown. But what a changed white gown! She had cut out the neck of the bodice in what is known as a V, and her delicately rounded white throat rose, slim and gracefully long, out of the filmy, creamy folds of a fine old lace fichu, fastened at the breast with the pearl pin. From sleeves, cut off at the elbow, hung wide, soft lace ruffles. Beyond that modest display of her fairness she had not dared to go, lest she draw down her father's wrath. Her head, poised like a flower on its stem, was crowned with the waving masses of her bright chestnut hair. In that day of chignons, an artistic instinct had impelled her to try the experiment of drawing it all up to the top of her head in a soft, glossy mass of puffs, and when she had once seen herself that way, even the desire to look like other girls was not strong enough to induce her to change it. In fact, a greater contrast to the other girls, with their low coiffures and dresses off the shoulders could hardly be imagined. She looked rather like a beautiful portrait of their grandmothers' time. Very self-conscious,

very fearful lest after all, she wasn't "just right," she was yet unaware of her extreme conspicuousness and did not guess the buzz of comment which went around the rooms as she walked through them.

"Who *is* that wonderful girl?" asked Mrs. Bellenden, touching her husband on the arm. Mrs. Bellenden was the wife of the army officer detailed to the military professorship.

Major Bellenden didn't know, but Peter Malden, hearing the question, turned around with a twinkle in his eye. "She's the daughter of the Reverend Dr. Stirling, who hates us all so cordially," he said.

"Good heavens!" said Mrs. Bellenden.

Jessie, standing beside her mother and "receiving" with great dignity, had managed to whisper an ecstatic word as Isabel went past. "You look perfectly lovely!"

"Oh, do I look *right*?" Isabel whispered back. "Mother said I looked too theatrical and that she wouldn't have let me come this way if she had known."

"Didn't she know? Didn't she help?" Jessie made great eyes.

"She thought I'd wear my black grenadine, as she told me to do."

Isabel passed on, pushed by the crowd. When she stopped to speak to Jessie, her father and Lydia had left her behind and, at a loss what to do, she drew back a few steps and stood still. She had never before been present at any festivity so big and it seemed to her very grand and very exciting—the large, brilliantly lighted rooms, the crowd of people, all laughing and talking, and beyond the buzz of voices and dominating them, the strains of an unseen orchestra. It was crude music, but to the girl it added the last touch of gayety and enchantment. For the first time since Fordyce's departure she forgot that she had to try to be happy. When Edmund Gifford presently came toward her she greeted him with a radiant smile.

"Isn't it lovely!" she exclaimed.

Edmund smiled back at her. They were about the same

height and looked with a level glance into each other's eyes. He wanted to tell her that she was the loveliest thing there, but he refrained. Her apparent unconsciousness was another charm.

Before the arrival of the guests his mother had said to him, quite seriously: "There's one thing I particularly want you to do for me to-night. Find the very nicest youth you can for Isabel and if they sit in a corner and seem interested, let them alone. I want that child to have a good time."

Edmund had already announced that his mission in life that evening would be to break up the tête-à-têtes which it was the Ptolemy fashion to prolong for a whole evening. Jessie had been liberal in the arrangement of what she called "flirtation corners."

"I've just come," he now said to Isabel, "from making the absurd couples play puss-in-the-corner. They have all changed partners now."

"Do you suppose they like it?"

"They may as well learn to like it," he replied.

Isabel laughed. "Does everybody always do what you tell them to? They'll play puss-in-the-corner back again while your back is turned."

"I dare say. I'm going to show you our lions now. Have you met any of the university people?"

"Not one, and I'm so anxious to."

"Well, we'll just take a general survey first." They threaded their way through the crowd and he pointed out this and that professor and professor's wife as they went along. "That," he said, directing her glance to a tall and remarkably thin man in a corner, "is Mr. Fielding Browne, the English professor, who has come over to cast in his lot with us. He is a very eminent man, you know."

The great man was the centre—apparently against his will—of an adoring group of middle-aged women, and every time one of them spoke to him he took an instinctive step backward.

"Would you like to meet him?" asked Edmund.

She surveyed the group. "Let's wait," she said.

Her attention was attracted by a bright-eyed girl who was talking vivaciously and looking about her with an interested air. "Who is that?" she asked.

"That's one of the brides. They're as thick as hops. These young professors have most of them been getting married, poor chaps. This one is Mrs. Boyd."

"She looks so nice. But why 'poor chaps'?"

"Oh, well, small salaries and high prices—" He stopped at a gasp of astonishment from Isabel.

The crowd had parted for a moment, giving them a glimpse of an exquisitely pretty little lady in a white gown, holding over her head a rose-colored sunshade.

"What—" exclaimed Isabel.

"That is Mrs. Hallett, another bride. The lights hurt her eyes—and she has the courage of her pink parasol. That very beautiful woman just beyond her is Mrs. Annesley, the wife of the president of the university. And behind her, talking to Mrs. Stirling, is Professor Hyde. He's rather an old dandy, isn't he?"

Isabel could not have told why she should have been so astonished to see Lydia just then. There came to her an odd recollection of her stepmother as she had known her in the days before she had married Father; a Lydia with more than a touch of coquetry. The gray-haired professor was evidently responsive to coquetry. His whole attitude and expression showed a sort of formal and heavy gallantry. He looked emphatically "a ladies' man." Isabel experienced the same sensation of disgust which in the days of her childhood overcame her at the sight of Lydia's little ways with her father, and her ingenuous face expressed her feelings so clearly that Edmund hurried her in another direction.

"I see a young man whom I want to introduce to you," he said. "He's a student and a very nice fellow. You'll let me bring him?"

"Why, of course," said Isabel. She thought she would rather have stayed with Edmund, but of course she couldn't keep him.

The young man was introduced as Mr. Burton. He

was a fair youth, not at all shy, with a winning frankness and an artless belief that all the world would be friendly to him and interested in him.

"Will you take Miss Stirling out to get some supper," said Edmund to him as he left them.

The young man offered her his arm—they offered the arm in those days—and they made their way to the dining-room. It seemed an oddly unfamiliar room to her now, with the crowd of people surrounding the long table set out with dainties of which she and Jessie had already snatched tastes in the kitchen. Ptolemy had no caterers then, and all the parties were homegrown, as one might say.

Young Burton foraged with the zeal and appetite of youth, bringing a laden plate for her and another for himself. Over the fried oysters and chicken salad he told her what a jolly place he found Ptolemy, and Farrell University. He started to say "bully," but suppressed the word, as being inelegant. He told her, too, what a fine fellow his chum was. "Really, Miss Stirling, you ought to know him. He has had a wonderful experience of life." Then there were the professors to talk about too. They all liked Professor Gifford—he was so nice to a fellow and didn't sit up aloft like some of them.

They were enjoying their supper immensely and when they had finished their oysters and salad he took her plate away and went in search of the next course. Isabel could have told him exactly what to get. There was an arrangement of sponge-cake and blanched almonds and whipped cream which she longed to taste. It hadn't been finished when she was last in the kitchen and it wouldn't be good the next day, if there were any of it left over, but she was shy about seeming eager in such a matter and made no allusion to it. He returned with large portions of ice-cream and slices of cake of various kinds; and between spoonfuls he entered on the subject of his family. His mother, it seemed, was about as young as her children—"really doesn't look five years older than Carrie. Carrie's my sister, you know, and she's older than me.

"They'll be coming next June to see me graduate. You know I'm a senior. I entered junior."

To Isabel he seemed immeasurably younger than herself, although he was, in fact, some years older. She liked him in a condescending way and encouraged his prattle.

When they left the dining-room they met her father, and she felt a passing wonder as to what he had been doing with himself. Somehow, she could not imagine him enjoying such an occasion. In fact, Dr. Stirling was not enjoying himself. Ordinarily surrounded by persons who deferred to him, and accustomed, even in social intercourse, to feel the familiar platform of the pulpit under his feet, he was half conscious now of an alien, if not an antagonistic atmosphere. To be sure, he had found, scattered about the rooms, many of his parishioners, but although greeting him deferentially and perhaps stopping for a brief interchange of remarks, they were too frankly interested in the new people to linger long. He attributed his discomfort to a distaste for the society of the worldly-minded and wanted to get back to his study.

"Where is your mother?" he asked, stopping Isabel.

"I don't know," she replied. Then, with a sense that the courtesy was required of her, she somewhat timidly presented young Burton, who shook hands with the parson with unintimidated friendliness, yet with a decent respect. He made a pleasant impression on the older man, who, however, was still intent on getting away.

"It is time for us to be going," he said to Isabel.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, dismayed. To her, the evening was still in its prime.

"Let me see you home later," put in young Burton eagerly.

She hesitated, looking at her father. Fortunately, that was a natural arrangement in Ptolemy, and he made no objection, but continued his search for his wife, whose amusement he ruthlessly cut short. Lydia, greatly vexed, would have found an outlet for her irritation by insisting

that Isabel accompany them, but by that time the girl could not be found. She and the boy had ensconced themselves in one of the nooks so carefully arranged by Jessie.

To tell the truth, when Isabel readily acceded to young Burton's suggestion that they take possession of "that jolly little corner," she did so with the recollection that Edmund had declared himself a foe to corners and with an agreeable anticipation of his interruption. The boy was all very well for a while, but Edmund was much more amusing. Great was her surprise when he let her alone. The first time he passed she caught his eye and smiled. He smiled back, but walked past, having in mind his mother's injunction; and after that he appeared not to notice her. It seemed to her that everybody came past, but nobody stopped. According to Ptolemy etiquette, a flirtation corner was sacred from interruption. Isabel began to feel bored and at last, seeing Dr. Brenton standing near, talking to Cassie Malden, she announced that she must speak to him.

"I'll introduce you to Miss Malden," she added.

Cassie, looking very smart in a pink silk frock, held out her hand as they came up. "I haven't laid eyes on you all the evening," she said to Isabel. "I want to tell you that Aunt Mary was married this morning."

"Oh, not really!" exclaimed Isabel. "And oh! to Mr. Bentley?"

"Of course to Mr. Bentley. Who else? She wouldn't have a wedding party—only just ourselves. They've gone straight to their parsonage at Borrowville. I shall miss her dreadfully."

"Of course you will." A shadow came over Isabel's face. Against her will she recalled the night of the camp meeting. She was relieved when Cassie took young Burton in hand and carried him away. With Dr. Brenton she was always at her ease. He seemed like a great pillar, and there were moments when she loved the feeling of support. He smiled down at her with a quizzically affectionate glance.

"You look as if you were playing at being your young great-grandmother to-night," he said.

She looked down at her dress and back at him. She had never told him her troubles. "Don't you like my looks?" she asked.

"I always like your looks—only I think that when you put on that dress you ought to say your prayers and try to be particularly good, for you could be so very naughty in it."

She rose to the compliment. "I wouldn't mind being naughty," she declared.

He laughed, but gave her a more searching look from under his heavy brows. He was not unaware of the shadow which had haunted her eyes and had noted a slight accentuation of the oval of her perfectly tinted face. "There will be plenty of chances," he said. "The town is running over with them. That was a nice boy you had with you."

"I don't like little boys," she answered somewhat disdainfully.

"But you ought to like little boys. It's your business to like little boys—at your age. I see I shall have to give you a tonic."

She looked up at him, half smiling, half wistful. "I like your tonics. Do you remember when you and Norah gave me the egg-nog?"

"Norah will make you another egg-nog whenever you will come and get it."

"I'll come." She almost thought she would like to tell him her money troubles. . . .

Long after the party was over and all the lights were out, she stood before the glass in her own room. "I never looked like this before," she thought. "I wish he could have seen me."

The face in the glass smiled at her as she remembered what Dr. Brenton had said to her. "I'd love to make him sorry," she said to it.

XXVI

BETWEEN Isabel and her father matters did not improve. He was, she thought, even more silent than he had ever been, more aloof from the life of the house. Never did she find his eyes resting on her with a look of pride or affection. She remembered, with a pang, the way Aunt Eliza had looked at her. Yet there was one moment when it seemed to her that they might come together. It was when he asked her to walk with him to the cemetery to see the stone which had been placed at Aunt Eliza's grave.

It was a dismal morning in November. There had been a week of rainy weather and, although it was not raining now, the sun was still hidden and the wind blew in chilly gusts. The glory of the autumn was over and the ground was strewn with wet, sodden leaves. They talked but little as they went along. When at last they came to the cemetery wall they did not go in by the principal entrance with its iron gates, but by a stile which took them at once into the older part of the enclosure. Here there were few tall monuments such as bristled on the hillside above them. Here and there, to be sure, a column raised itself above its neighbors, surmounted perhaps with a ball over which hung a marble pall, looking, Isabel thought, like a wet towel. But for the most part the stones were small and old and many of the inscriptions were nearly obliterated. The paths were overgrown, the place looked neglected. There were not many left to care for this corner. Seldom a new grave was dug here, although occasionally some wanderer was brought back to lie among his kindred. Old trees waved their branches above these sunken mounds and a few hardy plants still blossomed from season to season—plants which had reverted to their wild estate.

Dr. Stirling led the way to the family lot. Here at least were evidences of care. The grass had been kept cut and the stones all stood straight. How many of them there were! Aunt Eliza's new headstone gleamed out white among the others. Isabel stood before it, reading the simple inscription. Then her eyes turned to another stone, not new, but less old than the rest. "Sacred to the Memory," so the inscription ran, "of Isabel, Wife of William Stirling." And then the dates of birth and death. Only twenty years old, that other Isabel.

The girl had brought some flowers. She divided them into three portions and placed them on the three graves—Grandma's, Aunt Eliza's, and her mother's. Since entering the cemetery neither she nor her father had spoken. William Stirling stood a little apart, under a great oak-tree. He followed her movements with gloomy eyes. Suddenly he began to speak in a hard monotone.

"I have never been able to understand the cult of the graveyard," he said.

Isabel started, but quickly divined that he was speaking to himself, rather than to her.

"If we believe anything at all," he went on, "we believe that they have put on immortality. And yet we come and hover about this place. We bring our perishing flowers, to add presently their suggestion of decay. For a little while we come, and then we forget—"He sighed deeply and relapsed into silence, forgetting all that he had intended to say. For he had indeed planned to improve the occasion.

Isabel stood still and waited, not daring to appear to have heard what he said, but feeling amazingly comforted by it. For surely, if Father had that feeling about the place it was not wicked for her to hate it too. Her heart turned to him and for the first time in her life she felt that they might understand each other—he and she, the last of their kin. She counted the graves and a shiver seized her. There were so many of them dead, and so few living. She turned a white face to her father and he, recalling himself, seemed at last to realize her presence.

"The stone was put in place a week ago," he said, in his usual tone, "but the weather has not been fit for you to come here before."

"Thank you for bringing me," she replied, drawing a little nearer to him.

"It is our joint memorial," said her father.

She put out her black-gloved fingers and touched his arm gently. "That is so good of you," she murmured.

He looked at her with a slight softening of expression.

"Father!" she said, gathering up her courage. "I have never known anything at all about my mother. Aunt Eliza was always away teaching and knew her so little. I—it isn't always easy to ask you—but here——"

She broke off and gazed at him wistfully. Here—her eyes seemed to say—here there is no question of any third person. You and I are here with our own.

His face was set in lines of gloom. In her voice, her manner, her glance, she had been suddenly like her mother. Her appeal was natural and he recognized her claim.

"Yes," he said slowly, "it is right that you should know her as far as may be possible." He paused, not knowing how to continue, gathering himself for the effort.

Isabel understood that it was as difficult for him to go on as it had been for her to open the subject. With a little more experience, a little more tact, she would have remained silent, but with a thought of helping him, she said softly: "Don't I ever remind you of her?"

"You are absolutely unlike her," he said harshly, with quick jealousy.

Then there was silence again. Isabel, wounded by the repulse, was still able to feel sorry for him. She pitied him just then, more than she pitied herself. She waited for him to speak, and waited in vain. He could not bring himself to begin. At last, with a sigh, she said gently:

"Perhaps you would rather talk to me some other time. See, it is raining now."

Loth to appear to be watching him, she occupied herself with her umbrella, which she unfurled and put up.

"It would be better," he said, and turned to go. He was relieved, but thought scornfully of the volatile temperament which could be diverted at such a moment by a few drops of rain.

And Isabel said to herself: "Poor Father! But surely it wasn't my fault that I was born."

The next day, when she went to him to pay her share of the expense of Aunt Eliza's headstone, he was as unapproachable as ever. It seemed to Isabel that they were even farther apart than before. It was small wonder that she continued henceforth to omit mentioning to him diversions which he would perhaps have forbidden.

XXVII

OF diversion Isabel had indeed a fairer share than her father would have thought compatible with her position as daughter of the parsonage. Certain duties she had. She must go to church twice on Sunday and to prayer meeting on the appointed weekday evening. Being considered unfit, in her unconverted state, to be a Sunday-school teacher, she was enrolled in a Bible class. At church sociables she was obliged, with the other young girls, to pass food to the older people; an office which she hated. And she must always appear promptly at prayers before breakfast. She had never been farther from any religious feeling than she was now. She had not even the interest which terror inspires. True, she said a perfunctory prayer at night and read a few verses in her Bible. Everybody did that, she supposed, and the omission really would make one a little uncomfortable. In church she had acquired a serviceable habit of fixing upon the preacher eyes which seemed attentive, while in fact she heard little or nothing of what he said. The prayer meetings she hated, and the Bible class, conducted on primitive lines, scarcely interested her. The exercises of religion, it seemed, must simply be endured in silence. As to the high ideals which grew up in the favoring atmosphere of Miss Pryor's school, they were lapsing into neglect, as far as any conscious cherishing of them was concerned. There remained, it is to be supposed, certain rudimentary instincts and principles.

Of duties, beyond religious ones, there were none. Lydia wanted no meddling in household matters, and as to the employment of the girl's leisure hours, her curiosity, usually so active, was, for the moment, diminishing, owing to an unusual occupation with affairs of her own.

William Stirling had never been given to petty curi-

osity. Over-punctilious as to his duty in large matters, he was far from being meddlesome in small, every-day doings. Those were things for women to attend to, and he had given his girl a mother. Even in Isabel's childhood, while he had punished with awful severity such of her iniquities as came to his knowledge, he had never played the spy. He assumed now that, under his wife's supervision, his daughter was engaged in the normal feminine pursuits of the household. He had no reason to suppose that Lydia would fail to keep in touch with Isabel's outside amusements; that she would actually encourage intimacies of which he could not approve did not enter his head. Certainly he would not have countenanced the girl's frequent visits to Edgewood House. Mrs. Bellenden, nothing daunted by the fact that she was Dr. Stirling's daughter, invited her there repeatedly, and Lydia smiled upon her going.

Mrs. Bellenden was a revelation to a girl who was used to people who salved their tyrannical consciences by treating their amusements largely as a matter of "Ought." Ptolemy was still in the stage when one did all sorts of pleasant things because it was one's duty to do them. One "ought to invite" so-and-so, or one "owed" so many people an entertainment. The army woman took her amusement as simply as she took her daily bread, and considered it equally necessary. Incidentally, she provided amusement for everybody about her, partly because she was kind-hearted, partly because one couldn't play alone.

"It's such a pity you don't dance," she said to Isabel, "but you must come up to dinner on Saturday just the same, and it may amuse you to watch them."

The Saturday afternoon dance at Edgewood House was an institution, and the chosen girls were glad enough to go there and eat a bad midday dinner for the sake of the fun. For the matter of that, everybody dined in the middle of the day in Ptolemy.

The big building, begun some years before as a hydro-pathic establishment and abandoned, had been bought by

the university and turned into barracks for the housing of students and professors. On the top floor were the students' dormitories, and below them lodged such professors as could not get quarters elsewhere. The Ptolemy of those days possessed very few houses to let and almost no boarding-houses.

On the first floor were two large and gloomy dining halls, one for the professors and one for the students, where unspeakably bad food was served to the inmates of the house, and a large room, usually known as the "Edgewood Parlor," which was the scene of most of the university festivities, official and unofficial.

In appearance this room was not a festal apartment. At one end was a small fireplace, looking infinitesimal in its large surroundings; at the other end, a bay window. In each corner stood a large bronze reproduction of a famous masterpiece of sculpture, while on the walls hung a series of engravings from Kaulbach's pictures; both bronzes and engravings having been lent by the president of the university, with the praiseworthy though futile design of making the room a little less hopelessly barn-like. Wooden benches were ranged around the walls, and on the floor was a red and black ingrain carpet, of the style affected by country churches. On this carpet the young people danced whenever they got a chance, and certain serious young professors, animated by a belated desire for frivolity, laboriously studied the Terpsichorean art under the direction of a French dancing master, imported from heaven knew where.

Isabel certainly found it entertaining, even to look on, and would have found it more so if she had not longed so intensely to be dancing with the others. It was not expected of her father's daughter, but she often felt that all that saved her from breaking the promise made so long ago, was the fact that she didn't know how. She never lacked company, for one boy or another always seemed glad to sit out the dances with her, and so, with what philosophy she could muster, she contented herself with the half loaf. Only, she sighed to herself, she had,

after all, little taste for boys. Lansing Fordyce had spoiled her for them. She cast a more interested eye toward the serious young professors, but they were too intent on practising their steps to care for ever so pretty a girl who could not advance their nimbleness.

Of the boys, young Harry Burton was the most constant in his attentions, the most eagerly ready to turn aside from the dancing and sit beside her. By degrees Isabel fell into a friendly liking for him and found herself not too bored by his prattle about himself, his friends, his studies and amusements, and the family to whom he was ever loyally devoted.

But with the coming of the New Year she found her most absorbing amusement in what seemed like a serious occupation. Edmund Gifford, who was an affectionate, but autocratic, elder brother, and who really loved to teach, had insisted that, even though "out of school," Jessie ought to be learning something, and that she could not do better than to learn of him; and he had taken very kindly to her suggestion that she would like Isabel for a companion in her lessons. To Isabel the opportunity seemed heaven-sent. Every Saturday morning she went with Jessie to his study; and she would far rather have missed the afternoon dance than the morning lesson.

Edmund was pleasing himself by experimenting with certain theories of his own as to the stimulation of the youthful intellect. First of all, he was teaching them English, occasionally, by what seemed to his sister a roundabout way.

"But it isn't to teach you French," he explained, when he told them to bring him written translations. "It's to enlarge your English vocabulary and teach you precision."

Jessie translated with conscience and Isabel with enthusiasm and a certain inspiration. The search for the right word, the exact shade of meaning, seemed to her quite the most fascinating game that could be played. She astonished her teacher, who had found only measured praise for his sister's faithful work.

"Good—very good—very good indeed," he said to her

after one of her most successful performances. "You've got at the spirit of it. Some day, I think——"

"Yes——" she said eagerly, as he paused. "Some day—what?"

"Some day when you have lived long enough to have something to say, you may be able to write," he said judicially.

She turned crimson with delight. "Oh—something to say!" she breathed.

Edmund regarded her smilingly. It was agreeable to play with her excitement. "When you get old," he said, "you can write your reminiscences of these first days of the university. It will make good reading if someone doesn't edit all the interesting things out of it."

"But I don't want to wait till I'm old. It's too long even to think of!"

"You'll have to suppress too much if you do it sooner."

She laughed. "For instance, the two tall ladies who stood on guard, one on each side of Professor Fielding Browne in the bay window at the Founder's Day reception—and each of them so afraid the other would get him to turn her way."

"And old Professor Hyde," put in Jessie, "with his dignity and his gray hair and his flirtatiousness and his French receptions where people talk English in corners and he calls them to order in slow French."

"Don't forget our Founder, who wants every student who fails in his examinations to be given a fresh chance every time," remarked Edmund.

"It's so nice of him," said Jessie. "And have you thought of Mrs. Bellenden?" she went on. She can't walk a step, but can dance all night, and in the daytime lies in bed in her best nightgown, pinned with a big coral brooch, and receives calls from her dancing partners. She let you in, didn't she, Edmund?"

"She did," replied Edmund, "and she was very agreeable. You might write a novel, you know," he continued, turning to Isabel, "and leave the country before it was published."

"Are you going to write one?"

"I'm sorry to say that I can't do anything half so entertaining. My mind doesn't work that way."

"He has a *North American Review* kind of mind," said Jessie with pride.

"Oh, not so bad as that, I hope," said her brother with a grimace.

"I think he has any kind of mind he wants to have," said Isabel.

"Now that," said Edmund, "is the way I like a pupil to speak. I shall give you something very nice and difficult to do for next time—because you will like it, although Jessie won't. Jessie is lazy. As for you, Isabel, you are madly industrious when your industry is going to be appreciated. I don't quite know what you would be on a desert island. Perhaps you would sit on the sand and think what you were going to do the next day."

Isabel flushed. "I usually do the thing I intend to do," she said with spirit.

Edmund laughed. "You haven't tried it on the desert island."

XXVIII

ISABEL rushed home from her lesson and flew to shut herself up in her own room. Her brain was awlirl with the new idea. Of course—why, *of course* she would write the book—the novel. Naturally, she must do it in dead secrecy. Even Edmund, who had given her the idea, must never know it. She locked her door and sat down to think it over, glad that she need not be hurrying to dress for Edgewood House, although in the morning she had been disappointed and a little aggrieved at receiving a note from Mrs. Bellenden, countermanding the invitation for that afternoon, on account of a violent headache. What business had anyone to have headaches? But now it was different. Mrs. Bellenden could have all the headaches she liked.

Her plan was entrancing in the large; details, as she at once realized, might be perplexing. There was plenty of material, delicious material; but a novel could not consist altogether of descriptions of odd or interesting people. She must construct a plot. And of course there must be love—anguish and ecstasy. Well, she thought she knew all about that, and gave a short laugh at the idea of turning her own sad experience to use. She walked up and down the room, clasping and unclasping her hands, her brain filled with chaotic ideas.

In the midst of her creative ardor she was summoned to dinner. She took her place at the table and ate dreamily, but with a good appetite, quite unobservant that Lydia, who was usually deliberate over the important function of a meal, was in a flutter of haste to get this one over. Dr. Stirling, however, took as much time as usual. When at last he had finished, he went to his study, but not to remain. It was his custom to finish his sermon

by noon on Saturday and then, in order to satisfy his conscience by denying himself the pleasure of absorption in his studies during the hours preceding his strenuous Sunday labors, to spend the afternoon in a long walk. To-day he started out early.

Isabel went again to her room, but presently was seized with a desire to get out of doors. She felt that a walk in the open air would help her to marshal her thronging, but confused, ideas. As she came downstairs in her hat and coat she remembered that Lydia had asked her to do an errand for her, a trifling bit of shopping, and she went into the little sitting-room for the sample which she was to match. Lydia was not there and she looked on the desk, thinking to find what she wanted. What met her eyes was a neat pile of books which, familiar enough in themselves, looked oddly out of place there; a French grammar and dictionary and a note-book, such as she had always used for her own exercises. Lydia was no student and seldom even read a book. While Isabel stood gazing in surprise and amusement her stepmother came rustling down the stairs and into the room.

"What are you doing here?" she asked sharply.

Isabel noticed that she had changed her dress for one which she usually reserved for small festivities. "I came for the sample of ribbon," she said. "You know you wanted me to match it for you." She couldn't refrain from adding: "Are you studying French?"

"And why not?" asked Lydia, recovering her usual manner. "Did you fancy that one ever gave up learning?"

Isabel stared. "Why, no—only——"

"Little schoolgirls mustn't imagine that they are the only persons who ever do any studying. Here is the ribbon, and I want a yard and three-quarters—and it must match exactly."

Out in the clear cold air Isabel soon forgot her stepmother's vagaries. Down in Main Street she met several of the university ladies; Saturday afternoon was a great time for them to go out walking or shopping with their husbands. Professor Boyd and his pretty young

wife passed her with a cheerful greeting. She had a pleasant acquaintance with Mrs. Boyd, dating from the first formal call, which she had made under Lydia's escort. Lydia had been quick to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the young woman's appearance at Dr. Stirling's church one Sunday morning; the only time she ever did go there. Lydia's acquaintance with her never got much forwarder, but Amy Boyd lost her heart to the minister's daughter. In response to a cordial urgency Isabel had been several times to the little house and was already learning something of university life from the point of view of a young pair who had married on the strength of a small salary and large hopes.

After she had conscientiously matched the ribbon she turned out of Main Street in a direction which led to the outskirts of the village, stepping briskly on the crisp snow with which the sidewalk was covered. Her thoughts went on joyously to the novel, whose problems she confronted with confidence. How, in the first place, was she to tell the story so as to bring in as much as possible of the life of the university? She decided that it must be told from the point of view of the newcomers. Might she not write a series of letters from a young professor's wife—or a journal? But no—there must be a love story, and it was not conceivable to Isabel that a married woman should have love affairs. What about a professor's sister? Yes, that would exactly do. A young sister who had come to stay with her brother and his wife and who would be in the heart of things and yet quite free to have affairs of her own. Professor Boyd's sister, for instance. She found herself laughing aloud at the thought. How little the Boyds would suspect that they had a shadowy sister beside them—a busy sister, taking notes with all her might. Oh, what fun!

She set to work to plan her first chapter. She would write neither letters nor journal, but would just let the professor's sister tell the story. Her heroine should be named Eleanor Maitland. As Eleanor Maitland she herself would lead a far more amusing life than Isabel

Stirling was living. She was suddenly in a great hurry to get home. She must begin at once.

She had now reached a bridge crossing one of the creeks which make their way from the hills above Ptolemy to the lake below, and in spite of her haste, she stopped for a moment to watch the waterfall which comes foaming down over the rocks a little above the bridge. It fell now between banks fringed with enormous and fantastic icicles. Would she have to put descriptions of Nature in her novel? What a wonderfully beautiful spectacle this was, with all that ice glittering in the sunshine; and how little she had ever really noticed or cared for such things. She wondered why, not realizing how little time she had to spare from her absorption in herself. However, she would now cultivate Nature. Suddenly a voice behind her made her start.

"Oh, how do you do, Miss Stirling," said the voice, and turning, she confronted young Harry Burton.

"This is certainly good luck," he said, cheerfully confident that it was good luck for both of them. "Isn't that a bully sight—that fall and all? Oh, I beg your pardon for my slang."

"No, don't. I like 'bully'".

They stood for a moment and then walked on. After all, it was pleasant to have a companion. Besides, Eleanor Maitland must see something of the students. As Eleanor she made herself more agreeable to him than she had ever done in her own person, and he told her over again, more intimately than ever, all about his past, present and future. She listened and questioned with a most delightful appearance of sympathy, storing in her memory a choice collection of slang phrases. She was in such a desperate hurry to write them down that when, as the short winter afternoon was drawing to a close, they reached the door of the parsonage, she greatly disappointed him by not inviting him to come in. However, when he showed a disposition to keep her lingering outside she did ask him to come to see her soon, and with that he went away in good spirits.

Isabel, all flushed and tingling with her cold walk, paused a moment in the hall to take off her rubber overshoes. The parlor door was half closed and from within came voices, Lydia's high tones alternating with deeper ones. Isabel paused, arrested in the act of pushing off one overshoe with the toe of the other foot. She had realized suddenly that Lydia was speaking French—very halting, slow, and incorrect French, to be sure, and spoken with an honest American accent.

"I never can understand Monsieur Giraud at all," she was saying, "but I understand you perfectly. You speak so well."

Monsieur Giraud, as Isabel knew, was a young Frenchman, an instructor in the university. But to whom was this ambiguous compliment addressed? She felt that she must find out, or perish in the attempt. She tiptoed to the parlor door and, keeping well in the shadow, peeped in. In the light which came through a west window she was able to descry the leonine mane and classical features of old Professor Hyde. Luckily Lydia had her back turned to the door.

Isabel fled to her room. She was divided between astonishment, mirth and scorn—that illimitable scorn which the young feel for the follies of their elders. As she put away her hat and coat an audacious idea nearly took her breath away. Dare she put Lydia into the book?

XXIX

LIFE now became busy and interesting, and one circumstance which had been a grief—if not a grievance—could be looked upon as a distinct advantage. Isabel had pitied herself because no one in the world seemed to need her; now she rejoiced in her freedom. The requirements of religion took little time; social duties took less, for although Lydia had at first seemed desirous of her company in paying visits and the like, she now encouraged the girl to go about by herself. For the rest, it was understood that she and Jessie were studying regularly. There would be no lack of time to write, no embarrassing questions as to her occupations. She even ceased to lament over what had been to her a sad disappointment; the fact that Lydia had been distinctly discouraging to her plan of inviting several of her schoolmates to visit her. She addressed herself with enthusiasm to her task.

Amy Boyd rejoiced at her increasing intimacy, for there were many hours of loneliness for the young wife in her little house, while her husband was busy with his classes or in his study, and Isabel was soon almost as much behind the scenes in the household as if she had really been Eleanor. It gave her the strangest feeling of duality, for sometimes she was quite simply herself, and at other times she was playing with all her might at being Eleanor.

"She's an odd girl," said Amy Boyd to her husband. "She is so interested in everything and yet at times so detached. One wonders what she is really thinking of."

"Of Harry Burton, perhaps."

"No," said Amy slowly, "I don't think she is. I don't think she cares for him at all."

"Then she isn't behaving prettily."

The criticism would have astonished her. Eleanor

must of course have some experience with young men and Harry Burton was the first to present himself. He did not seem to her a person to be taken seriously. In fact, her recent experience with Fordyce led her to think that no man need be taken very seriously. Probably none of them meant anything. As to Harry Burton, that he did not weary her was only because she found it so immensely amusing to be playing a part. But serious or not serious, it had not so far occurred to her that, as Isabel, she would be called to account for Eleanor's diversions.

Meantime, she was getting more and more into the inside of university life and was all the time growing more sympathetic with the difficulties of impecunious professors, or rather, of the poor professors' wives. She met a good many of them at the Boyds', heard much discussion of their problems, and was sometimes startled by their conclusions.

"It's my opinion," said Mrs. Henderson one day, "that there are just three courses for a college professor to take as to his domestic life—in case, of course, he hasn't any private income of his own."

"Hardly worth while making the exception," put in little Mrs. Foster, looking up briefly from her sewing. "A professor with a private income is almost as rare as a white crow."

"There's Professor Hardinge," said Amy Boyd, "and the president."

"Presidents don't count," replied the other. "And Professor Hardinge is the white crow. Well, Mrs. Henderson, what are the three courses. We want to know what our husbands ought to have done."

"Either," resumed Mrs. Henderson, "the professor should remain unmarried, or he should marry a woman of independent fortune, or he should marry a person not much above the servant class—or—well, there's a fourth alternative. They shouldn't have any children."

"I think you're horrid," said Amy. "I have no money, I'm not of the servant class, and I'm sure Henry is as glad he married me as I am that I married him."

"Do you have any more income than you spend?" asked Mrs. Henderson.

"No, but we hope the income will be larger."

"Well," said Mrs. Henderson, "we have three hundred dollars more than you. We have three children. That isn't many. Yet it means that I have to do the work of a servant—several servants, in fact. I'm well educated. I thought I was going to be a companion to my husband. Also, I liked being pretty—as I used to be. I'm not a companion to my husband; I'm not pretty any more; and I'm not trained to do the work I'm doing. I'm not even a very good mother. I haven't time to be—or strength. When I'm tired or in a hurry—and I'm always tired and in a hurry, then I'm cross and unjust. As to an increase of salary—don't you believe it. I suppose President Annesley told your husband that it would come almost immediately?"

"Yes," said Amy. "I suppose that most of the young men came on that understanding."

"Of course. Well, the president is optimistic and believed in his own promises. But the university is trying to be big, and it hasn't got the money. President Annesley would rather make a new department than do anything else in the world. And the professors' salaries will be the last thing he and the trustees will worry about. They say there are lots of young professors wanting jobs. The supply is greater than the demand. And President Annesley is a delightful man, but he hasn't an ounce of practical knowledge of money. He was born with a gold spoon in his mouth—and his fairy godmother denied him the gift of imagination. So there you are."

"But," persisted Amy, "Henry thinks all the inconveniences—the simple living and all that—are worth while, if a man can only do his work—the real work for which he was made. Of course the worst is the lack of proper apparatus and all the books one needs—but those will come."

"Oh, yes," scoffed Mrs. Henderson. "Plain living

and high thinking. We all hear that. Only the trouble is, the high thinking falls to the man, and his wife has such a hard time with the plain living that she can't think at all, much less think highly."

Isabel listened with all her ears. It was the same story with so many of them. As far as she could make out, drudgery, debt and discouragement seemed to be the lot of the women. Some of the husbands pursued their way indifferent or oblivious to the turmoil of the family life; others, more sensitive, denied themselves all rest and leisure and even, it was whispered, cheapened themselves in the eyes of the learned, in order to earn a few dollars by writing popular magazine articles or lectures. But, as someone commented caustically, the trustees didn't care a hang about the quality of a man's publications. They respected him in proportion to the number of his printed words. Meantime, life was still rose-colored to Amy Boyd, although even she would say sometimes:

"If only Ptolemy people weren't so hospitable, and if only Ptolemy mud were not so deep! We can't afford a carriage for their parties and it's so hard to walk up and down all these endless hills."

Isabel put it all into the book. In the book she went to all the parties. She went in overshoes and waterproof cloak, holding up her dress carefully. But what did that matter? In the book she danced like a sylph and was the belle of every ball.

More and more insistent was the temptation to put Lydia in the book. Not, of course, as a minister's wife, nor as anybody's stepmother. Isabel had her niche all ready for her. A lady of Ptolemy she was to be, unmarried and not too poor; and she was to display all her little coquetties.

For a long time she resisted temptation, yielding at last as a matter of experiment. "I'll just try it," she said to herself, "and see how it goes." It went so well that she continued. The scenes in which Lydia figured seemed to write themselves. Reading them over, she

hadn't the heart to take them out. Lydia was by far the most real person in the book and so wove herself into the story that at last it seemed that she could not be taken out without disintegrating the whole fabric. But in personal appearance Isabel made her quite different from the real Lydia. In fact, that was her one precaution with all her characters. She slipped them into different bodies, made the tall short and the short tall, the brunette fair and the blonde dark; often with a feeling that she was thereby lessening their effectiveness. She wondered whether the soul really took the pattern of the body, or whether simply she could not see deeply enough. Lydia couldn't be quite Lydia to her without that elaborate sandy coiffure and those pale greenish eyes. Yet in portraying her stepmother she was too near the truth for safety. On Amy, her happy, make-believe sister, she put her most loving touches. And then one day she discovered her friend in tears.

"Oh, Amy dear, what is it?" she exclaimed.

Amy raised her head and wiped her eyes drearily. Her pretty light hair was all ruffled and damp. "I'm going to have a baby," she said.

"But that will be lovely," said Isabel shyly. The girls of her generation did not talk easily about such matters.

"No, it won't. It will be perfectly horrid. It's the end of Henry and me—and the beginning of Mrs. Henderson."

"I thought people always expected to have a baby," said Isabel blushing.

Amy laughed through her tears. "I suppose they do, in a way," she said. "But you see, when we got here and saw what life was going to be like, I hoped it wouldn't be for a good while yet. Why, we've only just begun to have a good time together, Henry and I."

Isabel felt sympathetic and embarrassed. She wondered what Eleanor would say and do. She would be the maiden aunt and a great help, doubtless.

"Isn't there anything I can do for you?" she asked.

"You dear thing!" said Amy, putting out her hand impulsively to clasp Isabel's. "No, I must dree my weird by myself. I shall be very uninteresting to you—making baby-clothes and looking horrid, and afterwards all taken up with It. If only I could be sure it would be the only It!"

"I'm sorry for you," said the make-believe sister. "I'll come and help you sew—and do all I can."

"And be a sort of aunt to It," said Amy. "Well, let's make the best of the time while there's any time left."

At first Isabel was too sympathetic to think of anything but the real Amy and her troubles, but as time went on she wondered whether she could put such business as that in the book. She saw that it was needed to complete the picture of real life, but it seemed horribly immodest to write about such a thing. She put it off, weighed it in her mind, and then one day locked her door and, blushing immoderately, set herself to write of the trial of a coming baby when one was happy without it and would be too poor with it. Fortunately she wrote as the young maiden aunt-to-be, and the immaturity of her point of view was in character.

XXX

It really did not occur to Dr. Stirling that a young man's attendance at his Sunday evening service meant anything else than that the young man had been properly brought up and had retained, even amid the distractions and temptations of college life, a proper respect for religion. To Lydia it furnished a strengthening of her argument that, the university once established, it behooved them to gain and keep what influence they could with students and professors, even to the point of joining in their social diversions. Not that Lydia was in the least deceived as to the true cause of Harry Burton's churchgoing. When they happened to meet at the church door—a meeting which seldom failed to take place—she invited him into the minister's pew, and after the service was over, dispatched the two young people ahead, while she waited for her husband; and if they loitered by the way so that she and William passed them and reached home before them, no notice was taken of the matter even by the minister, it being very much the custom for a girl to be escorted home by a young man. True, he would not have allowed Isabel to invite an escort to come into the house on a Sunday evening, but as winter yielded to spring, and spring to early summer, the young people could linger on the porch with impunity. Their voices were inaudible in the study, to which Dr. Stirling always betook himself gladly.

It was on the porch, on a moonlight evening in early June, that young Harry Burton brought home to Isabel the drawbacks of a double personality. As Eleanor, she still found herself amused by her flirtation with him and was altogether taken aback when, as Isabel, she was held to account for the encouragement she had given him.

In point of fact, he had not needed much encouragement, being an optimistic lad. He was so sure of her answer that he didn't even wait for it. He was at some pains, however, to explain his prospects.

"You are the only girl I have ever cared for," said he, "and you have been so good to me that I know you care too. As soon as I've finished my law course at Columbia my father is going to take me into partnership—and then we can be married." He tried to possess himself of her hand.

"Oh, no!" said Isabel, hastily drawing it away.

"'Oh, no!'" he mimicked her. "What do you mean by 'oh, no'? No one can see." He put his arm around her.

She jumped quickly from her seat beside him. "I've never thought of such a thing!" she exclaimed. "You mustn't think of it either."

"Oh, well!" He laughed a little at her. "I like a girl to be a little stand-offish—but not too much. Of course you've thought of it. I've given you every reason to. Sit down again. I won't touch you till you let me, but we've got to talk about it."

She was half frightened, half angry, at his confident tone. She would not sit down, but leaned against a pillar of the porch. "There's no use talking," she said firmly.

"Oh, yes, there is," he replied cheerfully. "I want to tell you how I fell in love with you the first time I saw you—and I'm sure I made it plain enough. You've always liked me too—you know you have. It seemed so jolly that we should be falling in love right along together—just coming to meet each other—and no agonies about it."

"But I wasn't—I didn't!"

"I suppose you weren't thinking as much about it as I was," he answered, a little more soberly. "But now—now that you know how much I care. I haven't got the words to tell you how much I care—dear, sweet, beautiful Isabel!"

There was a thrill and tremor in his voice, and in the moonlight his young face showed a gravity and an emotion which she had never seen in him before. She had a sudden sick feeling. What had she been doing, playing make-believe with this? Why, this was real! She had to answer, to say something. Her voice faltered over the words which she tried to make clear enough.

He argued, he was incredulous, it seemed that he would never understand; but when he was at last convinced that she was seriously refusing him he was hotly indignant. He told her she was a heartless flirt and her conscience told her that he was speaking the truth. She was very humble, terribly remorseful, begged him to forgive her if she had misled him, said she was sorry.

"Sorry!" he retorted. "I don't believe it. You've had lots of fun out of me, no doubt."

And that, too, was true.

When he had at last taken himself away, sore and angry, she went upstairs, feeling utterly miserable and ashamed. That she, with her ideals, should have behaved so abominably, seemed incredible. It was all the fault of the book and her silly idea that she could play at being an imaginary person. She wished she had never thought of the book. A sly imp told her that she had acquired a valuable chapter, but she repelled the idea. Never, she told herself, could she make copy of such an experience. On that she at last went to sleep.

As the days passed she found herself taking a more cheerful view of the matter. She was still sorry and ashamed, but Harry Burton's heart would mend. She couldn't imagine him in the rôle of a despairing hero. Of course she was going to be very careful in the future, but suppose she did use this experience. He would never know it. She went to her desk. As she placed a sheet of paper before her she suddenly laughed aloud. "The female Goethe!" she said jeeringly and dipped her pen into the ink. . . .

But even when all possible use had been made of this episode, her heroine was not fitted with a lover. Well,

the one safe thing for her to do was to cast Lansing Fordyce for the part. She need not even trouble herself to put him in a different body. Making him a professor would be a sufficient disguise; and a fascinating young professor she proposed him to be. Her industry received a fresh stimulus.

But after all, the affair went slowly. It was all smooth sailing as long as she occupied herself with descriptions of his personal appearance and certain little tricks of phrase and manner; and with the effect of his personality on her Eleanor. But then came difficulties; and in despair she locked up her manuscript and did not look at it for a month. For when she tried to imagine how her hero would behave and what he would say under certain circumstances, she found herself against a blank wall. She didn't in the least know what he would think or do. She knew other people. Harry Burton was an open book to her, and she had a fair conception of Edmund Gifford and even of Henry Boyd, but Lansing Fordyce, the man to whom she had been willing to hand herself over, soul and body, she seemed not to know at all. The thought gave her pause. What was it, then, that she had loved? Was it only his good looks and his charming manner? She repudiated the thought. Had she then, although so ignorant of detail, really divined the spiritual part of him, and was that what she loved? She would fain have thought so, but there was his summary and inexplicable leave-taking. She had never been willing to believe that he had been flirting with her, even as she had flirted with Harry Burton—but . . .

In her crude attempt at creative work she was learning to think, to analyze, to differentiate.

XXXI

THERE was one person besides Amy Boyd who had noticed Isabel's odd detachment of mind. Edmund Gifford watched her curiously, wondering what had happened to her. Not but what her lessons were as well prepared as usual. She was as eager as ever to learn, more eager, if possible, but there was a look in her eyes as if she were seeing something beyond the vision of the others; and sometimes an amused little smile hovered on her lips, as if at a joke in which they had no share.

"What is it?" he said suddenly one day, when the smile was particularly provoking to his curiosity.

She started and flushed. "What is what?" She looked guilty.

"Have you eaten the canary?"

"Do I look like the cat?"

"You look as if you might have eaten the canary."

"Well, I haven't." A fresh smile flashed out. "But perhaps I shall, yet."

Then, to avoid his inquisitive eyes, she asked what he was doing. She and Jessie had just come into his study for their lesson and he had not yet put away the work which had engaged him at their entrance.

"But what is it?" repeated Isabel as, instead of answering her question, he continued to look at her.

"It is proof," he replied, beginning to roll up the long strips. "Galley proof that I have to correct."

"Oh, let me see." She wondered excitedly whether she would ever have proof of her own to correct. "It must be awfully difficult."

"No, you can learn it all in the back of the dictionary." He was laying it aside.

"But mayn't I look at it? I want to see how you do it—and I'd like to see something that is going to be in a book. Is it for the *North American*?"

"Sit down over here then, and I'll give you a five minutes' lesson."

She and Jessie usually placed themselves on the opposite side of the table, but now she went and sat beside him while he made the cabalistic marks of correction. He explained them to her and let her make some of the corrections herself. And then an odd thing happened to him. For when, in her absorption, she leaned so near him that her hair brushed his face, he found that he could not keep his mind fixed on the subject of proof corrections. Instead, he was seized with a perfectly absurd desire to kiss the pink tip of her little ear. He drew back hastily, a little disconcerted and a little amused. He wondered what she would say if he yielded to the impulse.

"Is this the end?" she asked regretfully, as she came to the bottom of the long strip.

"This is the end," he replied, rolling it up. "You make a very successful proof-reader."

"It's great fun," she said, as she went back to her usual place beside Jessie. She told herself joyfully that it was a good thing to have learned, in case of need.

They began the lesson, but both teacher and pupil were a little preoccupied. It had just occurred to Isabel that she might, for her hero of fiction, make a composite of Lansing Fordyce and Edmund—put Edmund in Fordyce's body. She had such opportunities to study him and this time she would be absolutely safe. Edmund was almost like a brother. But somehow, she couldn't quite see him in Fordyce's body. She was looking at him with a fixed gaze of which she was unaware. With a self-consciousness which was new to him, he repeated a question impatiently, but she did not hear him.

"Do you think," she asked suddenly, "that people's souls are the same shape as their bodies?"

Jessie, who had been conscientiously fixing her mind on the lesson, looked up in surprise, and Edmund laughed.

"I don't quite see the connection," he said. "However—we don't mind digressions. Well, I hope not."

"Why?"

"Because, personally, it would annoy me. It might do very well for you or Jessie. But bodily, you see, I'm not as tall as I could wish, and more inclined to fatness than I find pleasing. I'd like to think of my soul as more symmetrical than my body."

"A tall, slender soul?" said Isabel, laughing too, but still looking at him with that odd scrutiny.

"Tall—yes; slender, if you like—but not meagre. I shouldn't like a meagre soul."

"An Apollo of a soul," put in Jessie. "And I wonder what mine is like."

"Yours is like you," said Isabel. "Awfully sweet, but with a nice little tang to it."

"Shall we say a sort of worldly Madonna?" said Edmund.

"Yes, just that. And mine? What is mine like?"

"Yours will do very well if it is like Isabel Stirling."

She was too intent on following up the subject to notice the swift look he gave her. "Seems to me it might do better than that," she said. "I want a pretty comparison too."

"She doesn't need it!" cried Jessie. "She's the only one of us that can really afford to have the soul that goes with her body."

"I wonder—" began Isabel, and stopped.

"Oh, yes, you can."

But that was not what she had meant. She had seemed suddenly to get a glimpse of her soul, and she wondered whether it might not be too well housed for its deserts. It was a disconcerting thought and she made haste to put it aside, while she told herself that

at all events she could try the experiment of giving Edmund's soul the tenement he thought suited to it. She only said:

"Please, Teacher, excuse me for interrupting the lesson."

XXXII

THIS summer was very different from the last. Cassie Malden, who had contributed so much to the gayety last year, had gone abroad with her father; and Jessie was engaged. Ralph Everett had been faithful. He had come back to finish his course and he had not taken her refusal too seriously. Just before Commencement she had accepted him, but they were not to be married for the present. Isabel had a wistful feeling of being left alone. The book had been coming on spasmodically. There were days and weeks when she was horribly tired of it and wished it had never been begun. The thing which was most apt to send her back to it was the recollection of Edmund's insinuation that her industry needed the spur of appreciation. "*I am* trying it on the desert island," she would say to herself, "and I'm going to do it!"

She had long lost sight of any half-cherished notion of taking Lydia out of the book. She was too important an element of comedy. Most comic of all, in her step-daughter's eyes, was her friendship with Professor Hyde. Up to the time of his going away for his vacation he had continued his visits at the parsonage, always, Isabel half unconsciously noted, on the afternoons when her father made his parochial visits or went for his walk. It never occurred to her innocence that married men and married women could do anything out of the way in their friendships. Marriage was, to her thinking, a fold within which everyone, or at least, everyone you knew, was secure. But it certainly did strike her as absurd; and for her own purposes, she made the most of the absurdity.

When she got warmed up to her work, however, she found that experimenting with Edmund's soul in Lansing Fordyce's body was even more entertaining than the de-

piction of Lydia and her follies; and infinitely more difficult. The intent, unconscious gaze of her gray eyes always piqued Edmund's curiosity and discomfited or attracted him, according to his mood at the time.

"I'd give more than a penny to know what you are thinking about," he said to her one day when she had sat looking at him for some moments without speaking.

She blushed up to her hair. "It wouldn't be worth it—to you," she said, laughing.

"To whom, then?"

"Oh, not to anyone." She still laughed. She hoped to make her thoughts worth something to herself. . . .

In September the book was drawing to its conclusion. Eleanor was to marry the composite hero, but the great love scene obstinately refused to come off. And then came the news that Amy's baby had arrived.

Duty to a friend required an early visit, but Isabel went with shy reluctance. Eleanor, she reflected, would be living in the house with it, but that did not seem to make it easier for Isabel.

The servant, looking somewhat flustered and cross, showed her into the sitting-room, from which Amy's bedroom opened. Although it was a warm day there was a fire in the fireplace. A rack, hung with various articles of infant apparel, was standing in front of it and the room was pervaded by a peculiar smell of damp flannel, unlike anything Isabel had ever encountered before. Presently a fat old woman came from the bedroom and spoke to her. Trained nurses were not yet obtainable in country towns and Mrs. Brown was considered a good nurse.

"You can come right in," she said, and Isabel timidly followed her into the other room. She went up to the bed and kissed the pale and smiling Amy. Her friend seemed to look at her across the gulf of an ennobling, but terrifying experience; and she was incomprehensibly absorbed in her hideous red baby.

"You must look at his darling little feet," she said;

and made the nurse unswathe them from the flannel coverings.

Isabel cared nothing for babies' feet.

On the whole, it was a disillusioning visit and, as a result of it, the idea of marriage nauseated her. Eventually she put the baby into the book, but she found it more difficult than ever to make her heroine fall properly in love with her hero. Since that was necessary (for who ever heard of a novel where the heroine did not fall in love with anybody?) she made a tremendous effort to put herself back into the frame of mind of a year before; with the result that her Eleanor became a rather pathetic picture of a girl yielding herself to love under protest and in terror of the traps which life was setting for her.

She was writing with determination now, intent on finishing. But it took more time than she could have imagined. The autumn was well advanced before the final chapter was written. After it she childishly printed "THE END" in large capitals.

Then she read it all through and gloated over it. It did seem to her so remarkably good. She hoped, however, that her characters would not be so recognizable to others as they appeared to herself. The process of fitting them into their places in the tale had compelled some modification of their personality, and the only conversations which she had given with an approach to literalness were those in which she herself had taken little part, or concerned such matters as everybody in the university was talking about. Certain persons must be recognized, but they were public characters, of whom anyone might write, such as the president of the university, and yes—Professor Hyde. She had a well-founded idea that he was unmistakable. But personally she had had little to do with him. Possibly the most searchingly faithful portrait was that of Lydia, but a Lydia with raven hair and olive skin, and unmarried, might well be unrecognizable, at any rate, to herself.

But the manuscript seemed portentously long, especially

in view of the fact that it must all be copied. It was written far too carelessly to send as it was. She had learned from Edmund such technical details as writing on one side of the paper and leaving fair margins, but of revision she had hardly an idea. What she had written seemed crystallized and unchangeable. She set herself to the copying—a weary task, during which she welcomed every interruption. The irksomeness of it made her desire to cut the manuscript down and brought about a sort of accidental revision. Yet in this she was after all guided by a natural sense of proportion and an instinct for selection. When at last she finished her copy the novel was shorter by some thousands of words and better put together than it had been in its first writing. She was able to see the improvement.

With its completion came the necessity of considering what was to be done with it. A publisher must be found, but how? It seemed impossible for her to manage the affair alone, if only on account of the danger entailed in receiving letters, not to speak of a possibly returned manuscript. But dare she confide in anybody? Edmund Gifford was the one person in the world who could be a real help, but he was sure to insist on reading the book, and what impediments would he place in her path? Worst of all, would he recognize himself? Really, she thought not. The more loverlike she had made her hero, the less like Edmund he had been; for in no possible guise of body could she picture Edmund as a lover.

After many hesitations she decided that the only thing to do was to take him partially into her confidence. She did not mean to let him read the manuscript—but if, after all he insisted. . . .

She flushed with pleasure at the thought of his appreciation. He would see how clever she was! She would speak to him the very next time she saw him alone.

XXXIII

It seemed that a quite extraordinary opportunity was presenting itself to Isabel the next evening. Her father and Lydia had gone to a tea-party to which she, luckily, was not invited. These parochial functions were not to her taste. It was pleasant, once in a way, to have the house to herself, but a bit lonely. She wished there were something worth while to do, something exciting. She wandered from the sitting-room to the parlor and extravagantly lighted several gas burners there. She could put them out before Lydia came back. The air seemed chilly. It was already winter and there was a snow flurry and a howling wind. If she could only put out the fire on the hearth as easily as she could extinguish the gas she would light that too. She opened the register, but she wanted the fire. Why not brave Lydia's disapproval? She stood with the match in her fingers when the door-bell rang. While the maid was answering it she struck the match and, stooping, touched it to the kindling. As she stood up and turned around, Edmund Gifford, of all people, came strolling in—Edmund, who was hardly ever known to come to the parsonage. It seemed unnatural and a little awkward to see him there, but she was glad to be seen in a cheerful room. Usually the maid turned up one burner on her way to open the door. He greeted her in his usual debonair manner and then, because she could hardly imagine his coming unless on some errand from Jessie, she asked:

“Does Jessie want me to come over?”

“Not as far as I know,” he replied. “I dare say she may want you,” he added, “but you see you can't go—because I am here.” He pulled a low chair forward to

the fire. "Do sit down here," he said, "and then I can sit down too. For I've come to pay you a visit. I knew you were alone."

Isabel laughed a little confusedly as she obediently sat down. "Do excuse me," she said, "I thought——"

He threw a smile across to her as he helped himself to a chair and pulled it cozily near to the fire and to her. "You thought I'd only come if Jessie sent me? But why shouldn't I come on my own account?"

"Well, you know, you never do."

"I believe I don't, very often." He seemed to consider the matter. "It would appear that I have been unmannerly. You see, I'm apt to think that you belong on my side of the fence."

"I know I'm there a good deal of the time," laughed Isabel. "But now that you're here——"

And then, just when, having gathered up her courage, she was opening her mouth to speak about the book, he opened his, and forever silenced her.

"You see," he said, "I almost never see you alone over at our house—and in any case—I have *some* sense of propriety."

He paused, encountered her look of ingenuous surprise and curiosity and went on:

"I wish you wouldn't look quite so surprised," he said. "It isn't encouraging."

Her eyes were fixed on him with their most intent gaze. It seemed so curious that he should hesitate and get red. It was embarrassing too. She couldn't think of anything to say.

"I suppose there might be nice ways of leading up," he said at last, recovering his usual whimsical expression. "Indeed, I've thought of several, but—they don't seem to have stayed by me. We'll let preambles go. . . . Don't you know that you have stolen my heart? I've come to ask if you will come altogether to my side of the fence."

He paused, but she still looked uncomprehending, although the color was mounting in her cheeks.

"My dear, will you marry me?" he said gently.

For a moment there was dead silence. Isabel continued to stare at him. Her face showed nothing but shocked astonishment.

"Are you still so surprised?" asked Edmund. "Hasn't it occurred to you that I might love you?"

"No," she said, in a husky, unnatural voice.

"Then I must tell you about it."

But no matter how clearly or even how ardently he might tell her, it remained incredible. Of course, if he could be in love at all. . . . But she simply could not imagine in him a capacity for the high emotion of love. It seemed so out of keeping with him. Even though he used the words of love and in the manner of love, she could not see him as a lover. The thought did indeed cross her mind that he would be a very friendly and pleasant person to live with, if one didn't have to marry him. If she had been a little older or a little more worldly-wise she might have hesitated and weighed the undoubted advantages of a marriage with Edmund, but when one is young one is very sure. And to marry him! Against her will Amy Boyd's baby-ridden house flashed to her mind. The thought of marrying Edmund gave her an aversion to him.

"Oh, why did you change?" she asked, when he at last gave her a chance to speak. "You were so nice. Everything was so nice."

"I haven't changed really. Suppose you take a little time to know me from this point of view. I didn't realize it would be such an entirely new one."

"Oh, time won't make any difference." She looked at him ruefully.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm quite sure. I can't do it. I can't care for you that way. And I'd so like to, if I could."

"I can't believe that I shall not persuade you to care—after a while."

"No, never," she said decidedly. "It isn't a thing I can explain—but I know."

He studied her face, then rose to his feet. "If you know—I suppose there's no more to be said."

Upon this acceptance of the situation Isabel found herself overcome with remorse. Did it always have this effect when one innocently studied a man as an imaginary lover? And how good he was, how different from Harry Burton, with his reproaches.

"It's all my fault," she said despairingly. "But I never meant to do it."

"Certainly it's not your fault," said Edmund. "My dear, you couldn't help my falling in love with you. You are made for men to love." He held out his hand. "Good-night."

At the door he turned back. "I have, after all, a message from Jessie—that is, she will be telling you herself. She will be busy to-morrow and can't have a lesson. I think we had best give up lessons for a time."

"Yes," said Isabel sadly. It seemed a just punishment to be banished from her friend's house. "I know—Jessie—none of you will want me any more."

"They will all want you as much as ever," he said quickly. "Surely no one is to know of this. As to the lessons—you must give me a little time. I'm not exactly up to it now. I shall make my own explanations to Jessie. She is absorbed in her affairs and will be glad enough to be let off. And I—oh, I am writing a book and can't be interrupted—that's all."

"Oh, thank you," said Isabel. She could hardly keep from crying then and there.

When he was gone she put out the lights, gave a glance at the fire which, from lack of coaxing, had gone out, and crept up to her room. Everything seemed miserable and desolate. If she could only have cared for Edmund how delightful everything would have been. All the arguments came to her now. To have the Giffords for her own family, to be free from her father's authority, to have her own position in the world—and plenty of money. And Edmund himself was so delightfully nice. Why couldn't she? She only knew that if she tried to do it

she would detest him. This, she reflected, was Fordyce Lansing's doing. He didn't want her himself and she had got over wanting him; but somehow he had made it impossible for her to care for anybody else. She thought she would probably never be in love at all any more.

A little later she half laughed as she thought how utterly unlike Edmund the hero of her novel was; more unlike than ever now that she had actually seen Edmund making love. Then she sighed. Impossible now ever to consult him about the book. She hated the book and thought that she might put it into the fire some day.

XXXIV

BUT after all, one doesn't burn the book which one has spent the better part of a year in writing. The manuscript stayed in a drawer while Isabel, in the sackcloth and ashes of repentance, mourned over her follies. Too shamed and embarrassed to go to the Giffords', she stayed away until Jessie came to her, asking plaintively what she had done to be so deserted. Then she resumed her visits and, reassured by the normal behavior of the family, was soon spending almost as much time there as ever. Edmund's manner to her was so unchanged that she began to wonder whether she was not taking the matter too seriously. But she saw him less often than before. He spent much time in his study, presumably writing the book which was the excuse for giving up the lessons. She missed the lessons and, as time went on, she missed an intangible something in Mrs. Gifford's manner to her and wondered how much she suspected. In point of fact, Mrs. Gifford had made a shrewd guess.

The winter was not in any way a repetition of the last. For one thing, the Bellendens were no longer there and there was very little gayety at Edgewood Hall. Major Bellenden had grown tired of conditions at the university and had asked to be ordered back to his regiment where, dropping his brevet rank, he had happily resumed the duties of a captain. They had, however, kept one link with Ptolemy in the person of Lily Brainard, who, after sedulously cultivating an intimacy with Mrs. Bellenden, had now been rewarded by an invitation to spend the winter with her in the heaven of an army post.

For the rest, Amy Boyd was absorbed in her baby and her domestic economies, and Jessie was absorbed in her engagement. As the edge of Isabel's remorse with regard

to Edmund wore off, her desires turned again to her book. After all, why not try to do something with it? Keeping it in a drawer was not going to undo any of the mischief.

But the old difficulties came up again. She could not manage the affair without help. She hesitated and deferred; and then, one spring day, went to Dr. Brenton.

"And what have you been doing with yourself?" he asked.

"Lots of things," she said. And then, all in a breath, she told him that she had been writing something which she was sending to a publisher and that she didn't want her father or Lydia to know anything about it, and might she give his address, so that if the manuscript were returned, as it probably would be, it would be in safe hands.

Dr. Brenton regarded her with amused indulgence. "I'll take care of it for you," he said, and discreetly suppressed a chuckle. So the child was trying to write. Well, it would serve to amuse her, though he would rather she were amusing herself with beaux and junketings.

"I've taken a *nom de plume*," she went on. "It will be directed to Miss Mary Mandeville, in your care."

An assumed name did not please Dr. Brenton. But after all, since she was confiding in him, where was the harm? He could keep her from getting into real mischief, and anyway, it was all child's play. He agreed, and then forgot the matter until one morning the parcel was handed in at his door by the expressman. He certainly was surprised by its size.

Isabel received it from him with that blank sensation which is not unknown to better writers than she. She carried it home and thrust it disgustedly into its familiar drawer, but pulled it out again when the letter which should have preceded it turned up. Incredible as it may seem, the manuscript was not unconditionally rejected. Selecting the publisher of whom she had heard Edmund speak with respect, she had chanced to send it to a man who was notoriously kind to beginners. Moreover, many

a novel was published in those days which in this era of a higher standard of technique would not get past the publisher's reader. That lower standard, combined with a style which, immature as it was, possessed a certain vivacity and cleverness, together with a lifelikeness in some of the characters, carried it along to be passed upon by the great publisher himself. He thought it showed promise and wrote the author a kind letter, suggesting certain alterations, after which he would like to look at it again.

Had the young writer been more experienced she would have been yet more surprised by this promising opening, but even as it was, she was breathless. She could hardly wait to begin the revision. Always apt at profiting by instruction, she could see the faults now that they were pointed out to her; could even see farther. She hastened her work, but did not scamp it. She wrote and rewrote, determined not to lose her chance by any carelessness. In the end, she did her revision passably well.

The manuscript did not return from its second journey. Instead, came a letter of acceptance; and in due time bundles of proof made their appearance.

Never was the way made easier for an indiscreet author. Dr. Brenton, overworked and worried by one of those epidemics of typhoid which visited the village in the days when people still clung to their old wells, hardly noted the mail which Michael laid on his table, and Isabel helped herself to such of it as belonged to her, excusing herself for not telling him of her success by the plea that he had no time to attend to her.

XXXV

ISABEL sat, ecstatic and a little terrified, before an unopened package from her publisher. The book, at last!

The expressman had left it at Dr. Brenton's house and the doctor was out when Isabel found it there, in his inner office. She gazed at it for a few moments before making any attempt to open it. Then, searching among the papers on the study table for the shears, which always lay there, she sat down on the floor, cut the string and unfolded one layer after another of wrapping paper. At last she came to the contents—six copies of her book in bright red bindings with gilt lettering on the back. Palpitating, she took up one of the volumes, turned it over, and finally opened it at the title page.

BEHIND THE SCENES

By Mary Mandeville

For the first time it occurred to her to wonder whether she would have liked to see her own name there. What an excitement there would be if she could take a copy to Jessie and say—I wrote this!

Well, there was Dr. Brenton. But she was afraid of Dr. Brenton. She turned the leaves and found that she did not dare to read a sentence. She was sure that blunders and stupidities would stare her out of countenance now that it was too late to mend them.

She sat holding the book in her hand, wondering whether she would venture to write Dr. Brenton's name in it. Surely that would not betray her to anyone who might chance to pick it up. In the end she decided not to do it. Rising, she went to the bookcase where he kept

the few novels with which he sometimes beguiled an hour of leisure. She squeezed it in between *Vanity Fair* and *David Copperfield* and then stood off to get the effect. It seemed to her that from any corner of the room she could see nothing but that fresh red binding. No fear but what he would find it. Then she went back to the pile of books and paper on the floor, took out another copy to smuggle home to her own room and, tying the pieces of cut string together, made the package up again and, opening the closet door, shoved it into the darkest corner. Of what use to her were those four copies? Of course, as she still assured herself, there never could be anything in the world so thrilling as to receive your very own book from your very own publisher, but somehow, she had never felt quite so lonely in her life.

Late that night, locked in her room, she opened her book at the first chapter and forced herself to read; and after the first few pages was enthralled by the contemplation of her own achievement. It seemed to her better than she had hoped—and yet worse; more dangerously recognizable. How soon, she wondered, would anyone in Ptolemy see it? Never, she almost hoped; and yet was perishing to hear their comments.

For days she held her breath when she walked past the Corner Bookstore and then, suddenly, to her terror and joy, there it was in the window. And presently it was being talked about on all sides. Ptolemy never had any doubt about it. No other town, no other university, could possibly have been intended; and as it was the first thing of the kind, the excitement was the greater. Some bought the book, others thriftily borrowed it, and the village library invested in three copies, which were out all the time.

But who was Mary Mandeville? Everybody asked everybody else. Opinions varied. There was some inclination to fix the responsibility on the wife of Professor Hardinge, a young woman who, by virtue of an independent income and a connection with leading families of New York and Boston, had seemed a little apart from

the general life of the university. Mrs. Hardinge was known to be clever and was suspected of feeling superior. Others, however, suspected Miss Emerson, a keen-witted spinster, who had lived in Ptolemy all her life and knew everybody, old and new. Mrs. Hardinge said she only wished she *had* written the book; it must have been a great lark for somebody—although if she had, she would perhaps have done it a little differently. Miss Emerson shook her head and said it would have been as much as her life was worth to have written it. But nobody believed denials.

Undeniably the characters were done from life, and it was naturally a favorite amusement to fit the portraits to the originals. Most of the originals failed to recognize themselves, while finding much amusement in pointing out likenesses to other people. The few who really did see themselves took it, on the whole, philosophically; and indeed, the portraits were not all unflattering. And persons who were not in the book at all longed to find themselves there. The president of the university, who was touched off according to the ideas of the faculty women who thought him a man without a heart, was immensely amused. "I'm not so unsympathetic as all that," he said to his wife, who was inclined to be indignant, "but a person who can see only one side may very well think so."

The author made a mortal enemy of the woman who thought that the portrait of Lydia was intended for her, but no one appeared to see Lydia in the book. For one thing, Professor Hyde's philanderings with her were well kept out of the public eye and the university people, at least, did not know her well; and since she was represented as a lady of Ptolemy, the town was searched for her, but not the parsonage. A few persons, like Miss Emerson, and the Giffords, undoubtedly had their ideas on the subject, but they discreetly kept them to themselves. Edmund Gifford, Isabel was convinced, saw through the whole affair. It was not for nothing that he had been her teacher in English. Not for nothing had he learned her tricks of thought and manner. He emerged

from his retirement and lay in wait for her with a light in his eye. She tried to avoid seeing him alone, but one day he cornered her. She was spending an afternoon with Jessie when he came into the room.

"Mother sent me for you," he said to his sister. "She wants to consult you about something."

As Jessie left the room he sat down by Isabel, picking up, as he passed a table, the red-bound book which figured so prominently just then on many tables.

"And what do you think of this?" he asked, fixing her with his bright gaze. "I haven't heard you say."

Isabel thought she had learned to answer that question very composedly. She always told the truth and said she liked it tremendously. Now, however, she found herself for an instant incapable of replying. She blushed vividly and the more she was enraged at herself for doing so, the more agonizingly the color mounted. In mercy, Edmund cast his eyes down and began to turn the leaves of the book. But he was not done with her.

With his gaze removed, she made shift to answer. "I like it very much, indeed," she said, trying for her usual tone.

He laughed a little. "I suppose you would," he said.

She turned on him. "Don't *you* like it?" She had been keenly desirous, all along, to know his real opinion. Her mind had not ceased to appeal to him for guidance.

"I like it in spots," he said. "It shows cleverness and promise. Of course it's indiscreet, and I think people are generally sorry in the end when they have been too indiscreet. But quite apart from that side of it, judging it from the literary point of view, it has merits and faults."

He then went on and gave her a rapid analysis of the book, pointing out faults which she was amazed at herself for not having seen before, praising, too, with judgment, but with sympathy. Wherever, forgetting personalities, she had had a flash of insight into human nature, or had toiled to get the right phrase or, by some happy inspiration, had captured the illuminating word, there he

never failed to understand and to appreciate. When they heard Jessie coming downstairs he rose and laid the book on the table again.

"I should have liked so much," he said, "to be of use to the author of this book. I think I might have helped in the making of it."

"I think you might," said Isabel; and there is no telling what else she would have said, but Jessie was already in the room.

Anonymity was growing tiresome and Isabel would have been delighted, now that the ice was broken, to have endless talks with Edmund, but he withdrew himself again and did not give her another opportunity. Very different had been her interview with Dr. Brenton, who lost no time, once he had discovered and read the book, in taking her to task. To him it seemed that Lydia leaped from the page.

"I ought to have been told about this," he said, with a severity which she had never before seen in him. "You ought to have shown it to me."

"I thought of telling you," she faltered, "but it was when you had all those cases of typhoid and I knew you didn't want to be bothered with me."

"You ought to have waited till I could attend to you. Oh, I suppose I was too easy-going. I ought to have looked after you from the first of it." His exasperation with her seemed to increase with his self-accusation. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "Isn't it enough for a young woman to have your good looks without wanting to be a blue-stocking in the bargain? How many people know about it?"

"Nobody but you." This was before her talk with Edmund.

"What in the world possessed you to put your step-mother into it?"

"I don't know. I—she—somehow I couldn't get away from her. Whenever I sat down to write it seemed as if she jumped right in. I tried to keep her out at first, and then—well, I couldn't resist it. And I thought probably

the book would never get printed anyway. And I don't think people really suspect. I've heard them say it was other people—or nobody at all. And oh, Dr. Brenton"—tears were near her eyes, but a smile just showed itself at the corners of her mouth—"you can't imagine what a comfort it is to find just the right words for a person who irritates you—and to write them down."

Dr. Brenton was not in the least mollified. He tried not to see the fascination of her, between tears and smiles. "Now, see here, Isabel," he said with energy, "you must never in your life let anyone know that you wrote this book—and you'll have better luck than you deserve if you don't get found out. Don't you see that it's only as long as people don't know who wrote it that they don't see Lydia in it? As soon as they suspect you they'll see her—as I did. You see that, don't you?"

"Yes, I see. But I never did want anyone to know that I wrote it."

"The time is sure to come when you would be very glad to have the credit of writing a clever book. We're all like that—want the credit of our cleverness."

She smiled outright now. "I'm so glad you think it's clever. It's the first nice thing you've said—and you my only confidant. My feelings have been hurt."

"Clever! Yes, you haven't any right to be so clever. It's unseemly. And now mind what I say, Isabel. You must never tell. And above all, your father must never know—never!"

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Isabel with a shudder.

"I might ask you to promise me—but I won't. You'll do it without. And promises—well. I don't like 'em."

"Neither do I," said Isabel.

Dr. Brenton was still unpacified. "What made you think of writing the thing anyway?" he asked, his brows drawn together in a frown.

"I've always wanted to write—and meant to. And besides, I hoped I might make some money."

"Money! Good Lord! Isn't your Aunt Eliza's money enough for you?"

She could not bear the scorn of his tone. "It might be if Father would let me have it!" she exclaimed, her voice shaking.

Dr. Brenton had been walking about the room. Now he sat down. "Tell me all about it," he said in a different voice, grave, but no longer stern.

"And why," he asked, after she had told him, "did you never tell me this before?"

"I hated to. And what good would it have done?"

"And did you suppose that your Uncle Brenton wouldn't help you out? That you must keep it all to yourself? And write a book with Lydia in it—to damn you! Oh, good Lord! If you were looking for destruction I should think you'd have put——" He stopped in time.

"You never told me before that you were my Uncle Brenton," said Isabel, half laughing, half crying. "I love you to be my Uncle Brenton, even if you do sc-scold me." The tears got the upper hand.

He took her hand and patted it. "Well, you know it now, and I've finished my scolding. Poor child, you've had enough trouble. And now—as your uncle—what can I do? I suppose you're clean out of money. William ought to be ashamed of himself."

"Oh, I didn't mean money," she cried. "I don't want any!"

"No? Well, I didn't give you a Christmas present, did I? Or a birthday present? I want to be a real story-book uncle, while I'm about it."

"Oh, you are, you are! And you know the book really will give me some money."

"Confound the book! It was an evil imp that set you to writing it." He paused and added seriously: "I hope you will never write another—but there's no telling—once you get that bee in your bonnet. And so now let me give you a piece of advice. If ever you want to put any of your acquaintances in print, don't serve 'em up raw. Let them simmer a good long while. Let people recognize boiled mutton if you like, but don't let them know which sheep it was."

XXXVI

THE first cheque from her publisher was an experience which would, Isabel felt, be unmatched by anything else that could ever happen to her. She opened the letter in her usual refuge, the doctor's inner office. The color flew to her face and her heart seemed to double its beats.

"Look!" she cried, holding it out to him.

He shook his head over it, started to speak and checked himself. Why not let her have what pleasure she could get? "Wonderful!" he said.

She came and sat on the arm of his chair. "You're not really pleased. You think—you think it's the wages of sin."

He laughed. "You put it strongly. But what do you think, yourself?"

She examined the cheque. "What do I think? I think this is the most perfectly beautiful piece of paper I ever saw in my life. Look! One thousand dollars. And anyway, the sinful part is only a little bit of that. Perhaps a tenth. I'll give a tenth to somebody who needs it dreadfully. But not to missionaries. I tell you what, Uncle Brenton, you must know some poor people who need money. You can give it for me."

"Conscience money?" But his tone was gentle. "You can't get rid of responsibility as easily as that."

"Don't you suppose I know that?" she exclaimed with sudden vehemence. "Don't you suppose I'm sorry I did it? Why, every time Lydia is a little nice to me I feel like a beast. And she does mean to be nice to me sometimes—only I hate her way of doing it. But things can never be undone—don't you suppose I realize that? And so many times can't even be confessed. I think—I've

thought before—it must be nice to be a Roman Catholic and confess to a priest, who doesn't really care what you do, and then you have it off your mind and it doesn't do him any harm."

"Do you know, I sometimes think so too." He paused, thinking of the confessions which had been made to him and of his inability to grant an absolution which would satisfy a dying penitent. "But you and I are not Catholics, my little Isabel. Now, Mary Mandeville must endorse that draft and I'll see that it gets into Isabel Stirling's bank account."

"And you'll take the hundred dollars for some of your poor people? And don't call it conscience money. I'd love to give it. I've so hated Father's way of making me give."

"We'll talk about that later," he answered, and at that she had to leave it. . . .

After her long time of leanness financial prosperity increased astoundingly that year. Her next surprising experience had also to do with money. Dr. Brenton had told her that when her twenty-first birthday came she ought to claim from her father the right to control her own matters. As it happened, he gave her the quarterly remittance a few days before that time. She put it away and waited.

On her birthday Dr. Brenton invited her and Jessie to supper and Norah made a beautiful cake, but at home no notice was taken of it. No notice ever had been taken of it there. Dr. Stirling made little of any anniversary and this one in particular was a day of bitterness to him. As for Lydia, as long as Isabel made no mention of it, she quite forgot it. Several days passed, and Isabel wondered that her father omitted his usual demand for the money. He happened to be particularly absorbed in his studies. He remembered, at last, however, and stopped her after breakfast with the command to come to his study with the cheque.

She went to his study, but did not carry the cheque with her. "I want to tell you," she began, breathlessly—

"I want to tell you," she said again, and again stopped. She really could not get her breath.

"Yes?" He turned on her a look of surprised inquiry.

"I was twenty-one last Tuesday," she said baldly.

He turned his desk chair around to face her more directly. There was a little more interest in his eyes. He looked as he did when he began those dreadful exhortations about the affairs of her Soul. She hastened to forestall him.

"It's about my money," she said, awkwardly standing before him. He had not asked her to sit down. "I think I might have control of it now." She had no breath left and her eyes dropped before the severity of his regard. Try as she would to assert herself, she never ceased to be afraid of him.

He took his time about replying, still fixing her with that gaze. When he spoke his voice was cold and his utterance deliberate. "Your moral claim to independence," he said, "is no greater than it has been at any time in your life."

She was glad she had not brought the cheque, for fear tempted her to yield. She gathered up her courage. "But I'm legally of age," she said in a low voice.

Her father smiled grimly. "In this State you were legally of age when you were eighteen, but I have not considered myself absolved on that account from my guardianship."

"I didn't think I ought to say anything until I was twenty-one."

"There is no magic about twenty-one. Until you show fitness to be trusted you should remain under tutelage."

At this her indignation rose and it was easy to speak. "But I have the right now to take charge of my own money," she said with spirit.

He looked thunderous, made a quick gesture and seemed on the verge of speech; then turned his chair away from her and gazed frowningly at the table for a moment. Turning back to her, he addressed her with a frigid politeness new to her in her discussions with him.

"Do I understand," he said, "that you stand on your legal rights?"

"Yes," she answered, and wondered at her own courage.

He opened a drawer of his table and took out a little leatherbound book. "Then I shall give you an account," he said, "of such of your money as has remained in my hands. It is all deposited in your name in the Savings Bank, and this is your pass-book. He held it out to her with an air of dismissal.

"But I don't understand!" she exclaimed in bewilderment. "I didn't suppose you had any money of mine except what you gave to the missionary societies."

"I requested you to give the money and you refused. As you were legally of age at eighteen I would not use your money without your consent—although I could and do command your obedience in all other matters, as long as you are an inmate of my house."

"But Father!" If he had only known it, she felt at that moment an immense admiration for him.

"There is nothing more to say, I think." He still offered her the book, but now with some inquiry in his glance.

She took the book and his eyes ceased to question her. He turned away. "Will you leave me to my work now," he said coldly.

"But there *is* something more to say!" She hoped she wasn't going to cry. "I have been unjust to you," she said in a voice which trembled, in spite of her efforts.

"That is of no account." He arranged his paper for writing.

She felt her emotion checked and when she spoke again her voice was steady. "I want you to give this money—all of it—for the things I supposed all along you had spent it for."

"Keep your money."

"How can you refuse it—for the missions?" she asked.

He sat motionless for a moment. "Very well," he then said, "you can give it to them on your own account."

"But that will be just what you didn't want. The giver was to be unknown and the money was to go through you. Do you want my name to appear? I will do just as you wish about it."

"It's rather late in the day for that." Her submission did not mollify him. He felt baffled and worsted.

In the end, however, he was compelled by his conscience to accept the charge, feeling that she had eluded him. Isabel sat down at the other side of the table and wrote her cheque.

"I wish we could understand each other better," she said wistfully, as she handed it to him.

"I wish we could," he replied. "I am ready to meet any real evidence of filial feeling on your part."

"But I've tried. I'm trying now."

"Now that you have gained your point."

There was the rub. She had come off conqueror. He took up his pen and began to write.

Isabel stood for a moment irresolute. Then she opened the door and left the room with a sigh of discouragement.

"I wonder," she said to herself, as she gained her own room, "I really do wonder whether I should have had the strength of mind to be so magnificent with my money if I hadn't already had a lot in the bank?"

XXXVII

"IN the sight of God I may be as good as a soldier," said Edmund in Isabel's ear—he had been placed beside her in the pew and the little old organ was bravely sounding forth Mendelssohn's Wedding March as the procession came slowly up the aisle—"but in the eyes of woman I am as dust beside him."

"I think they are perfectly beautiful," said Isabel.

"Well, yes, they are," he said, smiling at the back of her head. "It's only my mean envy which makes me seem to scoff. I'll take it all back. I might even enlist, if one could enlist as an officer—especially if I could be as goodlooking as young Malden."

"Which is he?" asked Isabel, interested to see Cassie's brother.

"The tallest one with the splendid figure, walking with the first bridesmaid. Haven't you ever seen him?"

"Once." She recalled the big boy who came running down the steps on that memorable day when she ran away and went home with Cassie. Good gracious! Who would ever have thought he could grow up like this?

But they were at the chancel now, and Edmund could make no more comments.

It was Lily Brainard's wedding. As a result of her winter at an army post she was marrying young Lieutenant Hazelton, who, as it happened, was Dick Malden's dearest friend; and directly after her return home she had taken herself and her good Presbyterian parents into the bosom of the Episcopal church. The gossips maintained that it was with an eye for a more picturesque setting for a military wedding, but Lily herself said that it was because it was her duty to be of the same religion as Frank.

During the reception at the Brainards' house, Isabel

had a better chance to look at Dick Malden. He was far better-looking than Cassie; tall, broad-shouldered and erect, with light brown hair from which the gold had not all disappeared, and the bluest of eyes which looked with a goodnatured twinkle out of a sunburned face. That cheerful expression was the only thing that reminded her of the freckled boy. There were not many freckles left. He was a great contrast to his friend Hazleton, who was shorter, slimmer, with dark hair and eager, bright dark eyes.

"That boy," commented Edmund, who was still by her side, "looks too sensitive for a girl like Lily. She's a cold-blooded little fish."

Isabel ceased, after a while, to be amused by Edmund. She felt out of it all and a little dispirited. Lily had asked her to be a bridesmaid, but her father had refused and she had herself felt resentful, on her father's account, of the Brainards' defection from his church.

She had a passing word with each member of the bridal party, as she went past them in the line of guests, and once or twice she caught Dick Malden's eyes, with a look of interest in them, but she had none of the good times which they were having with each other. How tiresome it was!

There was almost a riot on the sidewalk when the bride and groom pushed their way through the group of hilarious young people. Isabel, standing back from the crowd, felt more out of it than ever.

Very different was Jessie's wedding two days after. Isabel had participated in the joys of the trousseau, hung with rapture over the wedding gown and greedily welcomed each gift that came for the bride. She herself, with her new riches, had been able to buy a beautiful present, as well as a most satisfactory bridesmaid's costume. In all these preparations she really displayed far more enthusiasm than Jessie, who, while not uninterested in her bridal appurtenances, went about rather silently, with an uplifted look. Isabel liked Ralph well enough, but wondered that he could inspire such an expression.

What lightened her heart more than anything was the disappearance of the slight constraint of which she had been conscious in her relations with Mrs. Gifford. She became again as much the child of the house as ever. She was not without consciousness that Edmund made it easy for her. He did not keep out of the way as he had done at first, and, as far as she could see, his manner was as debonair as ever. She wondered whether he really had cared so very much after all. Perhaps his mother wondered too."

It was a home wedding, very simple and cheerful. As Isabel looked at Jessie, fair and sweet in her white dress and bridal veil, she wondered, as all girls wonder, when it would be her turn to have orange blossoms and tulle and all the rest of the most fascinating costume in the world, worn only for an hour in a lifetime, but involving so much. She wondered whether she could ever undertake all that it involved. All through the ceremony she was dreaming, wondering. . . .

But directly after, there were other things to take up one's attention. There was the bride to be kissed, and there were the guests who came up to salute the newly married pair and who had plenty of compliments for the pretty bridesmaids. The big old house was quite full of friends, old and new, to enjoy the lavish, old-fashioned hospitality with which the marriage of the only daughter was celebrated. Among the rest was Dick Malden, looking almost as handsome in his citizen's clothes as he had done in his uniform. Again Isabel had only a passing word with him, although she had seen his eyes fixed on her from across the room. But when he came to speak to her Ralph's tiresome best man interrupted. And this time it was she who must be engrossed with the bridal party. She wished he had been among them.

XXXVIII

ONCE more summer had come, after a long and somewhat dreary winter. Isabel had thought to write another novel; something which she could acknowledge. But she could never get beyond the first chapter. The trouble was, she didn't really want to write. What she wanted, whether she knew it or not, was to live; and life seemed at a standstill.

But now the town began to stir, in preparation for Commencement. The Maldens' house was opened; Edmund Gifford engaged his passage for Europe; and Jessie wrote that she couldn't come home at all this summer, but would her mother come to her in July. Isabel caught her breath at the news. It was pretty serious business getting married.

It was a vacant morning. Isabel had long ago ceased to offer the assistance in household matters which her stepmother did not desire; yet to Lydia, in spite of her recent progress toward emancipation, there seemed something immoral in a grown-up woman occupying herself with a book during the morning hours.

"It is such a pity," she remarked for the thousandth time, as she passed through the sitting-room, "that you are not more industrious with your needle. Some day you may be sorry that you have not a store of nicely made underclothes. That is—" she paused at the door—"that is, if you don't spoil your prospects by being too fanciful. Remember that she who goes through the wood may pick up a crooked stick at the last."

"I've heard so much about that crooked stick," said Isabel, lifting scornful eyes from her book.

"Even the crooked stick may not wait for you," re-

torted Lydia, shrugging her shoulders and raising her sandy eyebrows as she left the room.

Isabel threw down the book impatiently. Why must Lydia be so vulgar? She picked up her broad-brimmed hat and put it on as she went out of doors. Through the gate she went and up the hill, and then along the road to the left toward Edgewood House. Passing it, she crossed the bridge over the creek that raced and tumbled far below, between its precipitous banks, stopping for a moment to look down over the rail. Then she went on along the road through the campus, past the professors' houses and the ugly gray stone buildings, and out on the farther side. Here the sound of rushing water warned one of the neighborhood of the larger stream with its foaming waterfalls. A thick growth of trees partially hid it from view as one walked along the road.

Isabel went on until she came to an open space from which she could see the largest of the seven cataracts sweeping, all white with spray, into the deep gorge below. Here she left the road and went through the narrow belt of trees to the edge of the ravine. There was a grassy spot, quite out of sight of passers-by, where she liked to sit, watching the fall, which seemed, in its rush, to clear her mind of vexing thoughts. Indeed, for a while she was not consciously thinking of anything at all as she sat there, her hands clasped about her knees, gazing down at the white sheet of foam. At last, with a long breath, her body relaxed its tenseness, her hands dropped to her lap and she leaned back, half reclining on the bank. Vague thoughts drifted through her mind, disconnected, flitting. She thought of Jessie. In all Jessie's letters there was such a tone of happiness. Did it really make people so happy to be married? She wondered whether she herself was always to go on just as she was now. . . .

After a while she realized that the morning had slipped away and that she ought to be getting home. She rose to her feet, but, still loth to go, she walked to the very edge of the cliff, and, with one arm around a slender tree, stood for some time looking over into the whirlpool far

below at the foot of the fall. There was nothing to be heard but the rush of the falling water, but suddenly something made her turn her head. Behind her, a little higher up the bank, but so near that by stretching out an arm he could have touched her, stood a man. Instinctively she grasped the tree more firmly as she raised her eyes to his face.

"Oh!" It was an exclamation of surprise and recognition. The man was Dick Malden.

He called out to her at once, in a quick, imperative tone: "Come up right away! That place isn't safe."

She smiled at him, but did not move. "How do you do," she said. "I'm not in the least danger."

"Come up!" he repeated brusquely. "That place where you are hasn't much support. Your weight——"

Her face changed. She grasped the hand which he was holding out and in an instant was well up the bank, far away from the edge. "I thought," she said, rather breathlessly, "that you meant I would get dizzy, and I knew I wasn't going to."

"I was poking about down below and saw you there. I hurried up and then didn't dare speak for fear I'd startle you. I was so relieved when you turned around."

"I must have felt you looking at me."

"I wonder. I've been hoping to see something of you this time, but I certainly didn't want to start out by seeing you slip over a precipice. I never seemed able to do more than catch glimpses of you last time I was here—what with one wedding and another. It seems funny, you know, that I'd never seen you before then."

"You had—but you'd forgotten me."

"Oh, come now! I'd not have forgotten you."

She smiled at his indignant tone. It was a bit of flattery which was not unpleasing. "Well, at any rate, I saw *you*—and you seemed to look at me for a moment. I was about six, I think. You were bigger. It made an impression because I had run away and gone home with Cassie. I had the most beautiful time. But you see, you don't remember me."

"I suppose I was at the stupid age—and always up to some mischief or other. That was all I thought of then. But why did you disappear after that?"

"I was away—years and years. It was only when I came back, grown up, that I knew Cassie again."

"And then I was away."

As she looked up and met the frank and merry gaze of his blue eyes they seemed to tell her that the lost time was to be made up. What he said, however, was that he was only to be at home for a week. As they walked down the hill together he told her that he was going for a short trip abroad. That was why he had taken such a short leave last year—to have a little more time now.

"I'd have saved all last year's leave for it," he said, "only for Frank's wedding. I had to come for that. You see I couldn't get off when the rest of the family went, so I get my turn later."

She sighed with envy. How splendid to be a man and go off like that, without any fuss.

"But I wish I were going to be at home longer," he ended.

She glanced up at him. Those blue eyes had a singular directness of gaze.

At the parsonage door she invited him in with some trepidation. It was nearly dinner-time. Her father was likely to appear at any minute and she had long ago learned of his aversion to Peter Malden; an aversion which she was quite aware included his family. That he was fortunately still unaware of her friendship with Cassie was due partly to his inattention to the details of her life and partly to Cassie's protracted absences. She had no wish to hasten the discovery. Still, since she conceived that politeness required that Dick should be asked to come in, she invited him. To her relief, he declined. His father and Cassie would be expecting him.

"But you'll let me come another time?" he said.

"Oh, yes, do come another time," she answered cordially.

She was turning to go in, not thinking of shaking

hands at such an informal parting, but he held out his hand and, of course, she responded. She rather liked the way he shook hands. His clasp was just firm enough and not too impressive.

To her vexation, her stepmother met her in the hall. "Wasn't that Dick Malden?" asked Lydia with an interest that seemed excited.

"Yes," replied Isabel briefly.

Lydia had it on the end of her tongue to say that it was lucky "dear Father" had not seen him, but stopped herself. The girl was so contrary that she would be quite apt to show her independence by mentioning the matter at the dinner table. Instead, she only said: "I hear he is to sail for Europe very soon."

"So he says," said Isabel.

"Well," said Lydia, "I hope—" Isabel turned her back on her and started upstairs. "I hope all you young people will have a good time while he is here," finished Lydia.

XXXIX

FOLLOWED a week of junketings, driving parties, lake parties, picnics, lunches and suppers; and in whatever vacant hours were left, visits from Dick. Isabel knew she would have enjoyed it all more if Lydia had not been so transparently intent on keeping her father from seeing young Malden. Did Dick chance to be in the parlor when the study door opened and the minister's steps were heard coming along the hall, Lydia at once came from her little room, where she seemed always to be lying in wait, and under pretense of a message to be delivered to someone whom he would be likely to see, or a question as to something which must be attended to in his absence, or perhaps merely a good-bye, steered him out of the house; and as she passed the parlor door, always ahead of him, it would be gently swung to a little, just enough to keep him from seeing who might be within. The idea that Dick might notice these devices made Isabel's cheeks burn and she was sometimes tempted to thwart Lydia by calling out to her father as he passed. But that would be the most unnatural thing she could do; and if he once came in and saw Dick, he was quite capable of making things openly unpleasant. She reflected with exasperation that her father could be, by turns, the politest and the rudest man she had ever seen, depending on which was uppermost, the good breeding acquired from his mother, or the resentment, which, when disguised as righteous disapproval, was on occasion allowed free play. Besides, Dick probably saw nothing unusual in Lydia's attentions to her husband; and then—she herself enjoyed Dick's visits and would have been sorry to have them ended.

"Why," said Lydia from time to time, "why have you

given up your favorite little spot down by the gate, under the apple-tree? It is such a pretty spot. You ought to show it to Mr. Malden."

The shortest way of meeting this was by apparent acquiescence. "Another time," Isabel would say.

True, it was a pretty spot, and not only out of sight of her father, but out of reach of Lydia, but it recalled Lansing Fordyce too insistently. Not that it gave her pain any longer to be reminded of Fordyce. Simply, she had a dislike to the idea of receiving Dick's visits there. Without putting it into words, she felt that she could not deliberately place Dick in surroundings which were not primarily his own. Comparing the two men, Fordyce seemed to her artificial. Dick was so natural. He was not particularly intellectual, like the professors; he was not, in fact, as clever as Cassie; but he was alert, quick-witted, and of a sort of shining cleanness, both of mind and body. In his society Isabel found herself happy and at her ease. She told herself, however, that he was not in the least the kind of man she could fall in love with. She had of late been forming her taste on certain superior young professors, and had built up for herself an ideal lover who should combine their excellences of intellect with the distinction of look and charm of manner with which they were not invariably dowered. But it was nice to be singled out by the man whose advent had caused a flutter among the other girls; nice to have him devote himself to her so exclusively. She thought she would like to have him as fond of her as he was of Cassie. He was very fond indeed of Cassie.

"I wish I had a brother," she said to Cassie. "I can't think of any better kind of relation to have."

"Not even a husband?" asked the sister, who was sufficiently observant of Dick.

"Far nicer than a husband," said Isabel with conviction. "It's all so natural and no complications."

Still, she had not yet begun to feel that aversion to a man who was not a brother which she had experienced on other occasions.

XL

DICK's steamer was due to sail the next day; and he and his father were smoking together on the verandah after luncheon.

"I suppose you are taking the night train?" said Peter Malden.

Dick flushed and didn't reply for a moment. Then he said abruptly: "What would you say if I gave up my passage and stayed home?"

Peter Malden would have been less surprised if he had paid more attention to the doings of the young people. He was not slow, however, in forming a surmise. He took the cigar out of his mouth and gave his son a long, shrewd look. "Who is it?" he asked.

Dick flushed again and laughed. He hesitated a moment, looking off through the thick foliage of the horse-chestnut trees to the street beyond. "You were always on to me," he said, "ever since the time when I ran away from my first school to go swimming."

"You weren't out of kilts." His father leaned back and stroked his heavy gray mustache, chuckling at the remembrance.

"And when any other little chap would have been spanked and put to bed, you hired a man to teach me to swim."

"You would have run away over again—and I didn't want to have you drowned. I was that selfish."

"And when I ran away to enlist you caught up with me and got me into West Point. I can't thank you enough for that."

"Well?" The cigar had gone out and Peter Malden tossed it away.

"Well—I suppose I've been fighting shy of your question."

"Don't tell me if you'd rather not."

"Oh, I don't mind telling you—want to, in fact. Only there's nothing to it yet. And perhaps there won't be—though I don't believe that. I want to marry Isabel Stirling. And so I've got to stay here and see if I can get her."

"The parson's daughter!" Peter's lips drew up as if to whistle, but he stopped himself. Selecting a cigar from the box on the table beside him, he cut the end off and lighted it.

"I know. You've no cause to like Dr. Stirling. I dare say it seems to you pure cussedness in me to have fallen in love just there. But Isabel isn't to blame for her father. You'll like her. Don't you know her?"

"By sight. A pretty girl. No, I don't like the parson and he don't like me. And of the two, I guess I've the most cause for a quarrel. I let him alone, but he wouldn't let me alone."

There was silence for a few moments while Peter puffed violently at his cigar, sending out clouds of smoke. "I wouldn't have had it happen," he said at last, frowningly.

Again silence. Then—"Have you got it hard?" said Peter.

"Yes."

"And for keeps?"

"For all my life."

Again a pause. Peter Malden lifted his tall, heavily built form out of the deep chair in which he had seated himself to take his ease and walked to the verandah rail. He gazed off to the horizon and up to the sky which showed blue through the tree-tops. He sighed once or twice. Then he turned and came back to Dick.

"Well, son," he said, "you're a man and you are free to make your own choice. If the girl will have you—and I don't see why she shouldn't—and if she can get away from the parson long enough to marry you, we'll give her a welcome."

Dick got up and took his father's hand in a tight grip. "Thank you, father," he said.

Later, he walked up to the parsonage. . . .

"I suppose this is good-bye," said Isabel, as he took his leave.

She was a little piqued by his cheerfulness and made her own manner as gay as possible, although really she found herself very low-spirited.

"Not at all," said Dick, "I'm not going anywhere."

"Not going anywhere? Why—but you sail to-morrow, don't you?" She quite failed to understand.

"I'm not going to sail at all."

"But what a dreadful disappointment!" It did not seem possible to her that anyone could voluntarily give up such a trip for any reason whatever.

"Shall I tell you why I'm staying?"

"Oh, I didn't mean to ask." But she hoped he would tell her and let her sympathize.

He looked at her intently. "I don't exactly mind telling you—but—" He hesitated for a moment. "You see—" he began again quickly and with an air of determination.

Suddenly she understood. She interrupted him with a foolish automatic remark and talked on, her heart beating furiously and her cheeks crimson.

Not for worlds would she have had him tell her. She ran away from him as actually as though she had bodily turned and fled, instead of standing quietly beside him and talking with nervous rapidity about the first thing that came to her lips.

He looked at her with a smile in his blue eyes. Yes, he had frightened her. He saw that. And he knew that she was running away. But he was not discouraged.

XLI

IT was always Dick's impression that Isabel was running away. He had no wish to hurry her. The weeks of his leave stretched out long before him. He thought she liked him really, and that when the time should come for him to try, he could overtake her. Meantime, he took her driving, rowing, sailing. He sequestered her in corners of verandahs on moonlight evenings; he sat next to her at the picnic luncheons; he walked with her over the hills. Encouraged by her, he talked of his army life, but having no inherent inclination to talk about himself, he said little of his personal experiences. But by degrees, he found himself becoming less articulate and there were pauses in his talk; pauses which she hastened to fill up. And the weeks slipped by.

Isabel felt that she was playing an exciting game; playing always for time. In her intervals of solitude she was thinking; questioning herself, doubting herself. Doubting herself the more because she remembered so distinctly how entirely without doubt or question she had been four years ago, when Lansing Fordyce had made love to her. She didn't for a moment doubt Dick. He inspired her with unquestioning confidence. She was troubled only about herself. She liked him—immensely. She was perfectly satisfied when they were together. Her heart quickened at his coming. And yet—and yet—it was not the headlong rapture of adoration which she had once felt. That Lansing Fordyce should have bereft her of a capacity for the fine ardor with which, as she conceived, one should meet the awakening of true love, was one more count against him. To have to ask oneself if one loved seemed to her a treason against love. And the anxious question perhaps indicated that it was not, after all, true love that one felt. And so the sooner Dick went his ways, the better for them both. But at

the thought, panic seized her. She did not want him to go his ways. And so she greeted him with welcoming smiles and then used all her wits to keep him from bringing matters to a crisis.

But the limits of patience are set by the limits of time; and time did at last begin to press. When only two weeks of his leave were left, Dick resolved not to be put off any longer. He made up his mind to speak out, no matter how many obstacles she put in his way. He would do it before he slept. Yet it seemed as if his resolution were to be defeated.

It was already midday when he made this pronouncement to himself. In the afternoon there was a long drive, followed by a picnic supper. The party was large and merry and privacy was out of the question. It must be afterwards then, although at that hour one did not usually pay a visit. One usually left a girl at her own door and went on. However, when he helped Isabel out of the carriage at the door of the parsonage he did not leave her.

"Go on without me," he called to the others. "I'm going to walk home."

Then, to Isabel: "May I come in?"

He might have chosen rather to detain her in the porch, but a light in the room above warned him that they might be overheard through the open window.

If he once came in she felt that she would not be able to prevent him from saying what he wanted to. Besides, by all Ptolemy standards of propriety, it was not a fitting hour for a visit.

"It's late," she said, "I don't believe——"

"No, it isn't too late," he replied, holding the door open for her to go in.

Too embarrassed to know how to meet the situation, her heart beating fast, she entered in silence and stood undecidedly in the hall. It was he who led the way into the parlor. She walked about the room aimlessly.

"It's going to rain to-morrow," she said. "We shan't be able to go on the lake."

"Won't you sit down?" How could he speak to her when she was half turned away from him and never still?

She dropped into a chair, but he remained standing. Still she babbled on about the weather, the picnic, anything. He stood looking down at her.

"But you know," he said at last, "I came in to-night to ask you a question. I've been trying all day to get a chance to ask it. I think you know what it is."

"Oh, no!"

The exclamation was involuntary and sounded more dreadfully final than she could have wished. "Wait!" she added faintly. She was quite breathless.

"But I've waited. I knew you wanted to wait. And now there's no time to wait any longer. Isabel——"

A step on the stair stopped him. In the open doorway appeared Dr. Stirling. In his room above, where he was just beginning to undress, he had heard the sound of their voices. Lydia, in bed, had heard them too, and had tried in vain to distract his attention. There were certain rules of propriety that must be observed, and once his attention was called to the infraction, he was ready to enforce them. Nobody must be admitted to the house after ten o'clock; least of all, a masculine visitor. Sternly he put on his coat again.

"Good evening," said he stiffly, as he entered the room.

"Good evening," returned Dick politely.

Dr. Stirling turned to Isabel. "I haven't the pleasure of your friend's acquaintance."

"It's Mr. Malden, Father," she said. "Lieutenant Malden." Oddly enough, she had regained her self-possession and was filled with an excited curiosity to see what would happen.

Her father looked at Dick, who acknowledged the introduction formally. For a moment no one said anything. Then stiffening still more, Dr. Stirling spoke:

"I do not," he said, "allow my daughter to bring in any visitor at this hour of the night. I do not allow her to bring in Lieutenant Malden at any time."

Except for the flush which mounted to his cheek, Dick appeared perfectly cool. "May I ask, sir, what is your objection to me?" he said.

"I need not state my objection. It is sufficient that I do not permit you to visit my daughter."

Dick had not really thought that the old feud would be carried as far as that, even though he knew that as a son-in-law he would be *persona non grata*. He glanced at Isabel and surely her eyes signalled encouragement. "I am very sorry you feel that way about me," he said, "for I hope that your daughter will permit me to ask your consent to our marriage."

Isabel had seen her father turn pale with anger before, but she had never seen him look as he did now. He stood for a moment, visibly struggling for self-control, his face setting in deeper lines.

"My daughter will not marry you," he said at last, very slowly.

"She must tell me so herself," said Dick. He was facing the older man with a fine gleam in his blue eyes. Now he turned to the girl. "Isabel, will you marry me?"

"Yes, Dick," she answered. There was not a moment's doubt or hesitation.

"Isabel, go to your room!" said her father.

"Yes, Father." She was glad to get away while Dick was still there. Not willingly would she have faced her father alone.

Dick had started toward her. She gave him her hand for an instant. "Good-night," she whispered.

"Good-night, dearest," he said huskily.

At the door she looked back. Her father was holding himself rigidly. After all, he was a splendid figure, standing there in his anger. A queer throb of pride in him gave her courage to speak. "Father," she said, "I'm sorry it has to be like this."

"Go!" he said, in his stern, level voice.

As soon as she was gone he turned to Dick. "Go!" he said. "And never come into this house again."

And Dick went, quite willingly and cheerfully.

XLII

WHEN summoned into her father's study the next morning Isabel was no longer afraid of him. But although the climax of his anger seemed to be past, his resolution was no less fixed. She must give up all acquaintance with every member of the Malden family. That was his command and he expected unswerving obedience.

"But I have promised to marry Dick," she replied.

"I will see to it that you do not," replied her father. "I think," he added, "that you are hardly in your right mind. You will promise to do as I bid you."

"But I am of age," she returned.

"You are under my care. It is my duty to protect you from yourself."

He could not extract the promise from her, but she uttered no more words of defiance.

"Until you promise," he said finally, "I shall see that you have no opportunity to disobey me."

There the conversation ended, but it had its results. To Isabel, who had known no petty restrictions, the orders which followed were galling to the last degree. Hardly less irksome were they to Lydia, in whose charge William placed the girl, with directions not to let her go out of the house alone, and not to let the young man in.

"Surely you managed very stupidly," she complained to Isabel. "You knew how your father would feel about it. Why did you let Dick Malden come in so late?"

"I couldn't help it," said Isabel irritably. "When a person asks to come in it is awkward to tell him he can't. Besides—I hate to be always deceiving. And anyway, Father would have had to know soon."

"You really mean to marry him?"

"Yes."

"Well, you are of age."

Isabel made no reply.

"Of course you know I must obey your dear father," Lydia went on, "and never let you go anywhere without me—though I'm sure I hate to be a jailer, and I'd never have dreamed of doing such a thing. I hope your father will relent in a little while, but now, as your Dick will be going away so soon, I will do all I conscientiously can to help you." She smiled archly. "A little note came this morning." She took it out of her pocket as she spoke.

Isabel accepted the note eagerly, although she hated that arch smile, hated to take her stepmother into any sort of partnership, hated the deceit of it. She started hastily to go up to her own room.

"You won't read it here?" said Lydia. "Well, I know just how you feel about it. And when you get a little answer ready I'll see that it gets to its destination."

Isabel hesitated at the door. "Underhand things are too horrid," she said. "But I'll have to answer it. Anybody would know that I must write this once. And—thank you." With this she vanished.

Lydia was distinctly less bored now that she was, as she felt, to have charge of the love-affair. Not only did she naturally love intrigue, but she was firmly resolved that what she considered so good a marriage should not be allowed to fall through.

Isabel cherished her first love-letter and read it over and over. Dick wrote that of course he must see her. Since he couldn't go to the house—and as he wrote, his mouth set firmly on the thought that he could go to no house whose master had turned him out—would she see him elsewhere—wherever she might choose.

He said many other things—things that were sweet to read. She sat down at her desk to answer him. She told him what her father had said, and that of course she would make no such promise; for how could she, when she meant to see him as soon as possible. And just here she stopped to wonder at the way all her doubts and hesitations had disappeared, from the moment when

she saw Dick confronting her father with that light in his blue eyes. Then she told him how Lydia had been appointed her warder; and here, as she went on to say, came the difficulty. "I think," she wrote, "that she would let me see you. She has given me your note and will send you mine. But it seems too perfectly horrid to make her break faith with my father. She owes him loyalty, for she has accepted the charge of me. So I don't want to use her as a means of seeing you or corresponding with you—and I'd hate to, anyway. If I can escape her genuinely I will do it. Surely you will understand how it is. Saturday afternoon Father will be out and I think Lydia has some affairs of her own and very likely will forget all about me. So if you will go up to the place where we first met and you kept me from falling over the cliff (how glad I am that you did keep me from falling) I will come there if I can—and I think I can. . . ."

She found him waiting for her. She had walked rapidly up the hill and along the campus, but when, through the trees, she saw him standing there, shyness took possession of her and she went toward him with steps that hesitated a little.

He came to meet her and took her hands. "You look as if you were going to run away," he said, and his eyes smiled at her. "No more running away now, if you please."

He lifted her hand and kissed her fingers; then put his arm around her and drew her to him. When he kissed her panic seized her and she pushed him away.

"But why?" he asked. "Doesn't one kiss one's beloved?"

"But I'm not used to you yet—or to kissing."

He laughed. "Well—of course not. But very soon you'll get used to me—and to kissing. For you're going to marry me now and go away with me, aren't you?"

"Now?" She gave a little gasp.

"My dear," he said seriously, "what else is there for us to do? I'll grant you, if your father had consented

to our engagement I'd have let you take your own time and have gone away and come back to get you whenever you said I might. But as it is—he's never going to consent—we've neither of us any illusions about that. We couldn't even write to each other openly—and we neither of us like underhand ways. No, believe me, darling, the short way is the best. And I don't get another leave for a year."

A year! Why, a year was impossible! Her face grew graver, more resolute.

"And you do love me," he said, not as a question, but as stating a fact.

Her eyes met his frankly and seriously. "Yes, I love you," she answered. "I wasn't sure until you asked me there, before Father, to marry you, but then I knew."

"Bless your father! And you *will* consent to marry me now, before I have to go?"

"Yes. I think you are right. But there are things to do. You'll tell your father and Cassie, won't you? And I—I think I must tell Uncle Brenton."

They sat down under a tree and talked of their plans—and of themselves, until at last Isabel started up in dismay.

"It's late!" she exclaimed. "Father will be coming home. And Lydia's visitor will be gone. There will be dreadful times and I may get locked up in my room next time."

At the edge of the wood she left him, to go home alone. She was fortunate enough to get to the door unseen and slipped softly in, thankful to hear voices from the parlor, showing that Lydia was still occupied. She glided through the dim hallway and just as she reached the foot of the stairs the parlor door opened. The doorway framed a picture of the professor and Lydia standing side by side, illuminated by the rays of the western sun, streaming on them from behind. Lifting Lydia's hand with a gallant gesture, the professor kissed it.

Isabel never could understand why she did not flee upstairs quietly, why instead she should have stood trans-

fixed; why, above all, she should have been guilty of that hysterical giggle. At its sound, Professor Hyde turned sharply and Lydia retreated into the room. Isabel did not wait to see more. She flew up the stairs and to her own room. She did not want to laugh, never had wanted to, in fact. She was horribly shocked and at first had a grotesque idea that she and Dick had been intentionally parodied. Instantly realizing the impossibility of that, she was almost equally shocked by the impropriety of Lydia, her father's wife, permitting such a familiarity. In her provincial eyes a kiss of the hand had the dimension of a very grave indiscretion; that is, for a married woman.

She walked up and down her room and, at every turn, her indignation increased. More than anything else she resented the spoiling, by this nauseating after-taste, of her own wonderful hour. How disgusting were the phlanderings of these two elderly married people—how unworthy a parody of her own unique experience! She wondered how she could ever meet Lydia again; and then began to wonder how Lydia was going to meet *her*.

The question was answered immediately. If Lydia had exercised her usual judgment she would have deferred the meeting and, in the end, would have ignored the scene. But she, no less than Isabel, artlessly overestimated the significance of a kiss of the hand. She had for some time been cherishing an estimation of her adventure in romantic friendship which would greatly have surprised the professor, who had kissed other hands and thought nothing of it. Lydia was blazing with anger. Isabel's laugh was never to be forgiven. At the same time, Lydia was frightened; and amid the emotions which agitated her, she lost sight of her usual discretion. The professor gone, she lost little time in coming to Isabel.

"It seems, then, that I couldn't trust you," she began. "Because I thought you could be trusted and left you for a little while, you took advantage of my confidence and left the house. No wonder your father feels that you must be watched."

Isabel, having no answer ready, simply looked at her in silence. Unconsciously to herself, there was a certain scornful appraisal in her expression which infuriated the older woman.

"If I should refuse to guard you," said Lydia. "If I should just hand you over to your father——"

The injustice of the attack stung Isabel. "You didn't care what I did," she said. "You wanted me out of the way. You always want me out of the way on Saturday afternoon."

Lydia trembled with anger, but kept control of her vocabulary. "Your mind is evil," she said. "You imagine that everyone is like yourself and your lover. He was not brought up as a gentleman, and it is impossible for you to understand the courtly manners of a noble gentleman. And so you insult him and me with your vulgar mirth and your low-minded suspicions. You ought to be overwhelmed with shame."

"I didn't mean to laugh," said Isabel. "I don't know why I did it. I don't know what you mean by suspicions. I only just think it isn't very nice for a married woman to do like that. And I don't think I am treating Father worse than you are. He—he wouldn't like it."

Lydia drew herself up. It was a disadvantage that in such a situation she should lack so much of Isabel's height. "My dear husband can never accuse me of violating the confidence which he reposes in me," she said, with what she felt was a superb air. Then she reflected for an instant. "This once, I shall not tell him about your escapade," she added, with an appearance of magnanimity.

Isabel was silent and her stepmother regarded her somewhat anxiously. "You ought to be very grateful to me," she added severely.

That her offer to conceal Isabel's transgression brought no response and left her still uncertain as to what the girl might say or do, increased Lydia's anger. It would have burned even more fiercely if she had suspected that the professor's wounded vanity would lead him to break

off his visits to her. The one thing he could not bear was ridicule; and what more galling to the elderly gallant than the ridicule of the young! In any case, he was growing a little weary of the intimacy, stimulating to constancy as had been Lydia's flattery and the tea-table with its dainties which she had instituted for his benefit. She never knew how much cause for self-gratulation she had that she took the initiative and could henceforth believe that the visits ceased because she willed them to do so. She resolved to write him a note saying that she would be out of town on the following Saturday and to go at once to make her sister a visit.

Unavoidably Sunday interposed a delay; but, while attending to all the usual religious exercises of the day, she had time to make her preparations and to broach her plan to her husband, who found it most inopportune.

"It is very inconvenient for me to have you away just now," he said.

"But Laura says she needs me extremely just now," fibbed Lydia. "She has been ill and Letty is going to be married. She surely has some claim on me, when one thinks how long I made my home with her."

She omitted to remember that, while these things were true, Mrs. Marvin had not asked for her presence. "You can't say," she added, "that I have left you often."

"But I need you for Isabel. She must be kept under surveillance for the present, and you know very well that I cannot be on hand all the time."

"Yes," said Lydia with an air of melancholy, "I put off speaking about Laura and her affairs, hoping that I could help you with Isabel. In that case it would have been my duty to stay. But really, William, it is impossible for me to control her. She needs a stronger hand than mine. After all, she is your own child, and I am only too often reminded that I am merely a step-mother."

"Do you mean that she is disrespectful to you?"

"Oh, no, she doesn't often *say* anything. There are other ways of making me feel it. Indeed, William, I have

done my best to win your child, but it is useless. I'm afraid her misunderstanding of me is wilful. And she is not always truthful. But perhaps if I leave you together—" Lydia quite felt that she was an unappreciated stepmother.

"What has she done since I asked you to watch her?" asked William.

"She escaped from me," answered Lydia, with an air of reluctance.

"She went out? To meet that young man?"

His portentous voice and frown reminded Lydia that she was treading a dangerous path. She wanted to make her own departure feasible, she wanted to discredit Isabel, but she did not want to have the girl irritated into retaliation.

"I don't know that she saw him at all," she said, which was technically true. "I dare say she only took a little walk. You might as well let it pass, since it is over and done with. I only mean to show you that I can't manage her. You will look out for her best. I have always noticed that she pays much more attention to your commands than to mine."

She made it quite clear to him that she intended to go. "I have never," she said, "set up the claims of my own people. I must do it now. Of course I want your consent, William. I couldn't go without."

In the end, he gave it, helplessly feeling that he could not refuse, since her sister needed her.

Lydia, however, did not know how to leave well enough alone. Before leaving by her early train the next morning, she visited Isabel in her room. "Now that I am going away," she said, "you and I must let bygones be bygones. I have told your dear father that I hoped he and you would learn to understand each other while I am away. And of course, dear Isabel, you will not say anything unkind about me—I have always been kind to you. You won't say anything that would make your dear father and me unhappy?"

Isabel looked her up and down. "You mean you don't want me to tell him about the Saturday afternoons?"

Lydia quivered under her youthful scorn. "You are—uncouth!" She knew it wasn't the word she wanted, but for once language failed her. She waited a moment, but Isabel stood quite still, looking at her. "Very well, then," she said at last, "since you put it that way, I do want you to promise not to make trouble. You could put a perfectly harmless trifle in such a way as to be very untrue, so I want you to say nothing about it. You promise me?"

Isabel, who felt that she would rather die than mention the thing to her father or to anyone else, was outraged at being asked to promise. She stood silent and unmoved.

"You won't promise me?" said Lydia.

"No, I won't promise anything," said Isabel, turning away.

Lydia went down to breakfast feeling horribly perturbed. William, as in duty bound, went with her to the train and, in the carriage, she shot her last arrow to discredit her stepdaughter.

"There's one thing I have it on my conscience to tell you," she said. "I think you ought to look after Isabel's expenditures. She has been spending much more money than she could possibly have in her possession and she may have made debts. That would be very unpleasant for you."

"She has controlled her income since she was twenty-one," he replied. "I don't doubt she has been extravagant, but I see no reason why she should be in debt."

Lydia's pale eyes gleamed with spite. "She couldn't have bought what she has out of her income. Look at the furs she got last winter, and her watch and chain. I know what such things cost better than you do. The watch and chain must have been over a hundred dollars and the furs nearly as much. She gave a good many Christmas presents and she got a great many clothes in

the spring. She spends money all the time. It is a thing that ought to be looked into."

"I will look into it," said William briefly.

"And you must remember," was Lydia's parting shot, "that she is not altogether truthful."

XLIII

WILLIAM STIRLING was not one to defer a duty; and in the present instance he was impelled by an indignation which he considered altogether righteous. As Lydia's train moved out of the station he snapped his watch shut and put it in his pocket; then, instead of walking home, got into the hack which had brought them down and told the man to hurry. He had promised to go, that day, to visit a former parishioner who was at present living in a village some twenty miles away and who now, on a sickbed, fancied that his former pastor might be of some comfort to him. The local train which would take him there was due to leave in a little over an hour. On the way up the hill he reflected that some arrangement must be made to guard Isabel during the day, and wondered whether he had better take her with him, which he did not at all want to do.

Jumping from the carriage and telling the man to wait, he strode into the house and, not finding Isabel there, opened the kitchen door and sent Bridget, the cook, in search of her. Ellen had already set forth on the vacation which Lydia had thriftily arranged for her to take during her own absence. He had a justified confidence that at eight o'clock in the morning Isabel would still be at home, whatever might be her intentions for the rest of the day; intentions which he proposed to thwart.

She came in from the garden and obeyed his summons with her usual reluctance. Never had a visit to his study been anything but unpleasant, except perhaps on the occasion when he had given her the freedom to spend her money in her own way. He was sitting in his writing chair, which he turned toward her as she came in. He did not tell her to sit down and she stood before him, tall and straight. He came to the point abruptly.

"You went out yesterday without your mother's knowledge," he said. "Where did you go?"

"I went for a walk."

"Alone?"

She was silent.

He frowned. "Don't try to deceive me. Were you alone?"

Her head went a little higher. "I don't intend to deceive you. I went to meet Dick. You won't let him come here."

"I forbade you to see him. I shall take measures to enforce obedience."

She made no reply, looking past him, out of the window.

"Do you hear me? Look at me!"

She turned her eyes to meet his. His face was even more grimly determined than she had ever seen it. Her heart beat fast, but she answered intrepidly: "Yes, Father. But I have promised to marry Dick."

His fingers closed on a heavy paper knife which was lying on the desk beside him. Then slowly he let it go. "You will not marry him," he said with finality.

For a moment he said no more. He held himself rigidly, looking her in the eyes. She longed to escape, but while his eyes held her she could not go.

"You have been spending money extravagantly," he said.

This was totally unexpected. The color flooded her face and he took it as a sign of guilt.

"Have you gone in debt?" he asked.

"No!" she said eagerly.

"Have you spent more than the income which your aunt left you?"

Oh, why did he put it in that way? If he had merely asked if she had spent more than her income she could so readily have said that she had not, but the form of his question made a truthful denial impossible. Had he found out anything? She turned from red to white and then to red again. Her hesitation and her changing color

betrayed her. With her father's anger was mingled an overpowering disgust. He regarded her with repugnance.

"Where did you get the money?" he asked.

She turned pale again and her knees trembled so that she put her hand on the back of a chair to steady herself. Still she did not answer. Dr. Brenton had said that her father must never know, and well she knew that for herself.

"You shall tell me!" he said. "Who has been giving you money? If I find that you have taken it——"

"Nobody gave it to me. It's my own money," she interrupted hastily. She felt that she was being hard pushed.

"If John Brenton has been giving you your capital he is liable to prosecution."

"But he hasn't."

"Has he made you a present of money?"

"No." She took a step back and half turned, as if to go.

William Stirling got up, walked to the door, locked it, put the key in his pocket and returning, stood rigidly before her. "Before you leave this room," he said, "you will tell me where you got the money you have been spending."

"I am not going to tell." Her voice was scarcely audible.

"You will tell."

Brave as she was, she quailed and was conquered. Her eyes dropped before his. There was silence, while he stood waiting. Then: "I earned the money," she said, in a low tone.

"Earned it? You expect me to believe you?"

The taunt in his voice was unbearable. Under its sting she regained courage, but in her anger cast away all thought of consequences. "I wrote a book," she said, "and got money for it."

He looked at her with absolute unbelief. "Lies are useless."

"I have never told you a lie. Not even when it would

have made things easier. I wrote a book—and got it published—and got money for it.”

Her father's face appalled her. Never even in her childhood had she been more afraid of him than she was now. She trembled lest he take a step toward her. But he held himself still.

“I think you are mad,” he said. “You have harbored devils so long that they have made you mad. You have denied your God until He will have no more of you. I have done my best and it has been of no avail!”

Something deep down in Isabel rose up and conquered fright. She faced him without a tremor. “Your best was not well done,” she said. “You never loved me, you were never kind to me, and you made me feel that God was just like you. You—and other people—always said He was a father—and then you showed me that a father did *not* love his child—did not care for her really, only cared to make her do his way. Did you expect me to love a God like that? It never has seemed to me that you yourself loved Him, or anyone else.”

She stopped, astonished at herself. As her father came toward her, terror revived. He did not touch her, nor did he speak a word. He unlocked the door, opened it, and motioned her to leave the room in front of him. Again he motioned her toward the stairs and followed her up. The sense of being driven was overwhelming in its humiliation. She went of her own accord to her room, horribly apprehensive lest he should follow her inside.

He only came in far enough to take the key out of the lock. Then he closed the door and locked it from the outside, taking the key out after he had done so. Directly after that she heard him go downstairs. A moment later the front door opened and closed again and she heard him drive away.

XLIV

For some moments Isabel stood motionless. It had been a tremendous relief to have her father shut the door between them. If he had laid his hand on her she felt that she could hardly have lived through the humiliation and she had feared it, seeing his anger and remembering her childhood.

With the shutting of the house-door the tension relaxed. She glanced quickly at the door of the closet. Yes, the key was still in it, and by a good chance that key also fitted the other lock. She could get out whenever she chose and her father would be away all day. Her knees were shaking and she dropped into the little old rocking chair by the window. She was glad to take time to think.

Her father would return in the evening and then he would ask more questions. He didn't believe now about the book, but he would believe in the end. "I must go away now," she said to herself. "It is the only thing."

There was but one place to go. Mrs. Gifford was with Jessie, but even if she had been at home, Dr. Brenton was the one person. He would understand. And she could send word to Dick to come to her there.

She listened intently. The house was very quiet. Looking out of the window, she saw Bridget, in her best clothes, walk away, down the path from the kitchen, treating herself to an unsanctioned outing in the absence of the master and mistress. 'It was a good thing. Now she would have the house to herself.

She opened her door and, just to make sure, tiptoed into all the rooms on that floor; then downstairs and tremblingly through the lower rooms. At the door of Lydia's sitting-room she paused. In this moment of

departure, memories of her childhood came back to her—bitter memories. She saw the room as it had been—dismantled, gloomy; shut off from all the cheerful world, with only the one door leading into her father's study. She remembered with a sick feeling how she had been led through the study to humiliating punishments and how, each time, she had hated her father with a fresh hatred—a passionate, futile hatred.

Then came back to her the night of awe and mystery and terror when she—she alone of all the house, had kept vigil near the mother she had never known and for whose sake her father had never forgiven her existence; yet for whose sake he could not keep watch for one night. He was already going to marry Lydia! A sob caught her by the throat. . . .

There was no time to lose. She went back to her room and put some things into a traveling bag; then dragged her empty trunk from the garret and packed it.

She took the little portrait of her mother down from the wall of her room, wrapped it carefully in soft things and put it into the trunk. Then she went again into the attic and, opening the little old trunk which held her mother's things, gathered them together, and made room for them in her own. Their bulk was not great, but she had to leave out some of her own things. She locked and strapped the trunk and left it standing in her room. She knew that although her father might have used force to detain herself, he would let her property go. Just before noon she left the house, carrying her handbag.

At Dr. Brenton's house welcome and sympathy greeted her. "Of course you did just the right thing when you came to me," the doctor assured her. "It's sheer good luck," he added, "that your father didn't believe you about the book—but when Lydia gets hold of it—" he shook his head.

"I don't feel sure he'll tell her," replied Isabel. "He doesn't always tell her things."

Dr. Brenton did not answer. He was wrinkling his

brow and reflecting anxiously. As far as he was concerned, he had no objection to standing up to William Stirling and telling him a home truth or two, but as long as the father and daughter were in different houses in the same town the girl's position could not but be a trying one. . . . Yes, her own plan was best, hasty as it seemed.

"And about Dick," Isabel was saying, "Father is *all* wrong."

"Yes—about Dick." The doctor took her hand, as she sat beside him, and patted it. "You haven't known him very long—but I have. He's a fine fellow and it's all right if you love each other enough. You love him, my dear? It isn't just because that father of yours won't let you have him?"

"Yes," said Isabel gravely. "I love him."

Looking into her eyes he saw something which had never been there before. Isabel was a child no longer.

"Won't you send for him now—right away?" she asked.

"Surely I'll send. He's the person to send for."

XLV

"WE'LL be married to-day," said Dick. He spoke with decision, the blood mounting to his brow, his eyes shining.

It was what she had expected, what she felt to be best, but a quiver went through her. They were standing before the fireplace in the doctor's parlor, gazing straight into each other's eyes, both her hands in his. For a moment now she looked away from him and out of the open window. It was a day of intense stillness. Between motionless leafy branches showed a bit of intensely blue sky. Then a little branch stirred as a bird alighted on it. The bird stopped but an instant before it rose against the blue. As her eyes followed it her spirit, too, rose. She turned again to her lover.

"Yes, Dick," she said. In her eyes was the new look and in her voice the new tone which revealed the unfolding of her soul. . . .

Through all the hurry which followed, Isabel never lost that impression of stillness. Yet hurry there must be, though not for her. Dr. Stirling was to return at six o'clock and Dr. Brenton, no less than Dick, was anxious to get the affair finished before that. There was much to do. Licenses were not necessary in those days, but a parson must be secured. Isabel's trunk must be retrieved, Dick must tell his father and prepare for a journey. While Norah, all excitement when she was told what was going forward, flew to work to prepare such a wedding feast as the time allowed.

Dick found his father in the library, busy over accounts. Peter Malden took the news philosophically.

"It seems the only way," he said, "if you mean to make sure of your girl." Then he puffed hard for a moment

at his cigar and reached out his hand for his ever-ready cheque-book. "You'll want money," he said.

"One never has to ask you," said Dick.

"I've known the want of it," replied his father, beginning to write. "How much do you need?"

"If you could let me have five hundred——"

"Unpractical young fool," growled Peter Malden.

He finished the cheque and shoved it across the table. It was for five thousand dollars.

Cassie was as excited and pleased as her brother could wish. She liked the romance of it, liked Isabel, and loved Dick so dearly that she would have appeared delighted even if she had not been so. She gratified him and herself by going at once to see Isabel and give her a sisterly welcome and then hurried back to look after his clothes and pack his trunk.

At four o'clock the little company was gathered in Dr. Brenton's parlor; Dick and his father and Cassie, and the Reverend Dr. Harrison, rector of St. James's. The clergyman was feeling a trifle dubious, even though, after an explanation of the circumstances, he had agreed to perform the ceremony for the son of a most valued parishioner. As for the others, there was a tense atmosphere surrounding them, a feeling of flurry and an anxiety to get the affair safely over.

Dr. Brenton went upstairs to the door of the room where Isabel, with scarcely a fleeting regret for the bridal paraphernalia dear to the heart of a girl, had been urged by Norah into her prettiest white summer gown.

"There'll be plenty of time to change," Norah had said, "and ye must be lookin' yer prettiest. 'Tis the one time in yer life."

And then Isabel had sent Norah away and had waited alone. She was still very calm, not thinking at all, simply waiting, in a strange hush of heart and mind.

"We are all ready," said Dr. Brenton, a note of emotion in his voice. He kissed her on the forehead as she came out of the room, and then turned and preceded her down the stairs.

As she stood for a moment in the doorway, tall and slender and lovely, the atmosphere of the room suddenly and subtly changed: excitement ceased, her own calm enveloped them all. And they all felt—these people who had known her from her childhood—as if they had never really seen her before.

She gave them no greeting, but stood looking at them with a serious, yet softly radiant expression. For just an instant no one moved. Then Dick, with a catch of the breath, stepped forward and, taking her by the hand, led her to the old clergyman.

She went through the service reverently and without a tremor. Dr. Brenton's voice failed him utterly and he could only give her away in dumb show, and Peter Malden felt his eyes growing moist and found himself saying under his breath: "No wonder—no wonder!" Cassie smiled her tears away, not to cast a gloom on the wedding, and Norah, in the background, wept unrestrainedly. As for Dr. Harrison, who had large experience in brides and bride psychology, he regarded this one with an unusual stirring of the heart, made up of admiration for her beauty, pity for her trustful ignorance, and indignation at her incredibly stupid father.

The train which carried the newly married pair away was already switching back and forth on the opposite hill when William Stirling, who had come in on the little railroad known as the Shoo Fly, drove up to his house. It had been a day of very unusual heart-searching with him. Fiercely dogmatic as he was, he yet had a conscience which was capable of making itself heard, a warped and twisted conscience, obedient to a creed of gloom, yet none the less, a monitor. And Isabel's daring shaft had reached the secret places. At first, to be sure, he angrily repelled the idea that he did not love the God to whose service he had devoted his life. It seemed to him, indeed, almost as blasphemous to doubt him as to doubt God Himself. He had, from time to time, been accused of many things, but never of that disloyalty. It rankled.

But presently, out of those fundamentally honest depths of his soul which had been overgrown by dogma and by the belief in his own infallibility—a belief nourished by that absence of contradiction which, in a minister's life fosters much self-ignorance—out of those depths, so seldom sounded, rose an insistent, teasing question. Was there truth in her accusation? The question, once admitted, opened the way astonishingly for some measure of self-criticism. Could it be, that by his own example he had shown himself a false and misleading interpreter of his religion? It seemed that he had made the idea of fatherhood hateful to his child. There had been too poignant a sincerity in Isabel's accusation for him to doubt that. He remembered that he had loved his own father, who had died while he was but a young lad. His mother seemed to stand before him, with her trenchant admonitions. He remembered her saying once that he had a grudge against God. Because of Bell. He thought of Bell. . . .

The William Stirling who came back to the parsonage was a humbler man than the William Stirling who had gone away in the morning. He had made some good resolutions. He felt compunction at the thought of Isabel, locked in her room all day; but he was not thinking at all about Dick Malden. That matter had been dismissed. He was in such haste to get home that he did not walk, as usual, but took the station cab.

As he came toward the house he was not overpleased to see John Brenton standing in the porch. Any outsider was an interruption now. His business was inside with his daughter and all other affairs must wait. He tried to excuse himself after a hurried greeting, but the visitor vexatiously held his ground.

"What I have to say is of importance," he said.

"Very well, then," said William ungraciously, his hand on the doorknob.

Dr. Brenton spoke deliberately. "Isabel was married two hours ago to Dick Malden. The ceremony took place in my house."

William Stirling stood motionless, his hand still on the doorknob. The silence lasted so long that the other man was moved to an unreasonable sympathy. "If the man could only swear!" he said to himself.

At last William's hand dropped to his side, the fingers clenched. "As she has made her bed, so she can lie on it!" he said in a voice shaking with rage. "I am through with her. The God in whom she does not believe will curse such a marriage. I leave her to Him."

John Brenton's wrath burst out at that. "Your curses may come back to you!" he said hotly. "It would be no more than you deserve. Why couldn't you treat her better when you had her?"

"Go!" said the minister furiously. "Why do you stay here?"

John Brenton shook his head and compressed his lips. Why, indeed, stay an instant with this madman? As he walked away he reflected that, for a man who couldn't swear, William was not without resources.

PART THREE

XLVI

ISABEL went high-heartedly and somewhat ignorantly into the adventure of marriage. Afterward she had revolts. Dick was very sweet with her and patient over things he couldn't quite understand, and she was more in love with him than ever before, but as to marriage. . . .

At least, until you had been married ten years or so and got used to it.

And yet her soul went out to him; and would he be so adorably her lover after ten years? He said, of course he would—and she was reassured.

They spent a short honeymoon in New York and she bought her pretty things and loved them. Then they took a week's journey across the continent to the post where Dick was stationed—and little she realized at the time, how lucky she was in that first post. For it was a land of flowers and sunshine; of pleasant people and good things to eat, and a good Chinese cook.

How she looked back all her life to that first station! From reveille to taps, from guard mounting to dress parade, she loved it all. Her heart quickened at the sound of the morning gun, awakening her from sleep, and her eyes grew moist when the evening gun boomed out and the great flag was lowered. Not since the war-time schooldays had she felt such a thrill of emotional patriotism.

For the rest, a second lieutenant's quarters are small, but Isabel had never been in the way of concerning herself much about her domestic surroundings. At home, Lydia had emphatically possessed the house, and before that it was boarding school. She had been singularly

detached from the paraphernalia of domestic life and had remained singularly ignorant of the woman's usual lore of housekeeping and sewing. It had seemed that such things as chairs and tables, sheets and towels, cups and saucers, pots and pans, simply existed, like other natural objects. To be sure, she had paused for a moment in the choosing of clothes, to ask Dick whether she ought not to be buying things for housekeeping; but Dick had answered that he had asked Cassie to send them a lot of things, and she gave the matter no further thought. So that presently she surprised herself and amused Dick by the rapturous affection which she developed for her household belongings.

"It's more fun!" she said, as she arranged their quarters; and "more fun" it continued to be.

She sighed happily when Dick spoke deprecatingly of the small quarters. "Oh," she said, "it seems boundless. There's no corner where we are not free to be ourselves!"

Nevertheless, the thought frequently recurred to her that this intimate life would be unbearably horrible if one had by mistake married anyone but the one and only man whom one could love.

As to housekeeping, the Chinaman was a treasure and one really didn't need to know how to do things. Moreover, they need not worry overmuch if living was expensive. Dick's father had made him a handsome wedding present of well invested securities, and her own little income was a great comfort. Again she did not quite know what a lucky second lieutenant's wife she was. Nor did she suspect that an exaggerated report of their financial prosperity had been spread abroad before their arrival. Lily Hazleton had not failed to expatiate on Peter Malden's wealth.

Lily and Frank were, naturally, the first persons to greet them on their arrival. Full of endearments was Lily, and all eagerness to do something to make the novice feel at home. She was quite the young army woman now, perfectly *au fait* in army customs and talk. It seemed a great joke to Isabel that Lily should patronize

her, but after all, it was pleasant to see someone whom she had known all her life.

"You just come and ask me if there is anything you want to know," Lily reiterated as she was taking her leave. She laid a caressing finger-tip on Isabel's hand. It was her new substitute for a kiss and there was no fault to find with it. "Sweet thing!" she said. But her parting smile was for Dick. "Frank is so happy to have you back. We expect to see a lot of you."

"Lily is just the same," said Isabel after she was gone, "only with a few new tricks."

"She's a nice little woman," said Dick. He was very happy to see his friend again, and Isabel was yet to learn that of his friend's wife there must be no criticism. Such was his idea of loyalty.

Presently began the entertainments for the bride, led off by Colonel Raynor, who gave a lieutenants' dinner, so that he might have Isabel at his right hand. The Colonel was a bachelor, and while some of the women had been heard to say that it was a pity for the commanding officer not to have a wife to help him entertain, it was generally felt that he did very well without one. Also, it was more interesting for visiting ladies. Isabel's curiosity about him had been quickened by Frank Hazleton's characterization of him. She had asked what he was like, this monarch whom they must all obey.

"Do you remember," Frank had replied, "the game where 'I love my love with an A'? Well, let's love our Colonel with an F. He's fair-minded and firm, and a good fighter, when fighting is in the day's work. Also, he's a flirt of the first water. And he loves his freedom with such a very large F that his flirting is innocuous to him and hopeless for the flirtee."

"He's so old for that," objected the young Isabel.

"'Age cannot wither, nor custom stale' the infinite variety of his flirtatiousness," replied Frank. "Besides, you don't know the army. We never grow old."

It was a gay little dinner that the Colonel gave in her honor. Dressed in the choicest of her bridal finery,

Isabel was delightful to look at and a-quiver with excitement, but found herself, to her chagrin, with nothing to say. The army post had its own small talk, and she had only the small talk of Ptolemy. If only, she thought, they would have let her alone, she could have listened comfortably and might have picked up a lot of their patter. She was not aware that her host would have been quite content to talk to her and have her say nothing in reply, so long as she could look so lovely. She did her best to respond to him, and felt like a dunce. And when he turned away from her for a moment, there was Mr. Betts, on her other side, conscientiously trying to adjust his conversation to her. It occurred to her to wonder what they would think if they knew she had written a novel, and then she wondered when, by the way, she was going to tell her husband about that novel.

Farther down, on the opposite side of the table, sat Lily. It seemed to her, in those days, that Lily was always in sight and always supremely at ease, with her demure smile and her coy drooping of pale lashes over her shallow light-blue eyes. Lily did not seem to talk so very much, but she listened, and the men were talking to her endlessly.

It was a cavalry party and they all talked horse. Isabel vowed that she would learn to talk horse too. She looked askance at her glass of champagne and wondered whether she would be transgressing any rule of army etiquette if she were to leave it untouched. She did not suspect that Colonel Raynor, who didn't consider Pommery Sec a lieutenant's wine, had, on this occasion, ordered it in her honor. She had tasted champagne during that honeymoon trip to New York and liked it, but was afraid of it. Moreover, so insidiously penetrating had been the code of the parsonage that she, who considered herself to be at odds with the parsonage rules, thought it a little wicked to drink any wine at all. However, she would rather be wicked than make a mistake, so she raised her glass to her lips and sipped. As she set it down she met the kindly eyes of her host. It seemed to her that he was

trying to think of something to say that might interest her. A flash of irritation sent the blood to her cheeks and drove away her shyness. She smiled at him frankly.

"I am absolutely out of all this," she said, "but I'm going to get into it as fast as I can. I've never been on a horse. I don't know anything about them—and I think I'm a little afraid of dogs."

Colonel Raynor laughed. "That's nothing," he said. "It will soon come as natural to you as to the rest of us."

"At any rate," she said, "I'm going to get over my ignorance. I'm cultivating the acquaintance of Dick's dog, and we are going to buy me a horse. And if I'm observant perhaps I'll soon learn which is the near and which is the off side of him."

"You're getting on famously," said the Colonel. "And you'll love it all after a while."

"I love it now," she replied, her eyes shining.

"Good! And you'll like the dances. You didn't get there last Saturday night."

Isabel's eyes drooped and the color flooded her face. Why did he have to mention dancing? She played with her fork for a moment and then faced him again. "I don't dance," she said.

Colonel Raynor could not remember ever having met a girl who didn't dance, or a married woman either, unless she were inordinately stout. "Oh, but you must change that," he said briskly. "I hope you'll give me many a waltz. And your husband is the best dancer at the post."

She shook her head. "When I was a child I promised my father that I would never dance in my life. So you see I can't."

"Well—" said the Colonel, and slipped off to another subject. How could he commend her sense of honor in keeping a promise which she ought not to have made, when her breaking it was only a matter of time?

As she and Dick walked home together, Isabel wondered again when she was going to tell him about the

book. She hardly ever thought of it nowadays, since she was in such a different world from the old one. It really was more comfortable to keep it out of her mind, for the better she knew Dick, the more certain she was that no one in the world would more thoroughly disapprove of her for having written it.

XLVII

DICK had assumed, as a matter of course, that Isabel would set aside the old promise about dancing, and was greatly put out when he found that she meant to keep her word.

"I don't see any sense in it," he said. "You could run away and marry me when your father forbade it, and now you can't do a much smaller thing."

"But I never promised not to marry you," said Isabel.

"But no human being could blame you for breaking a promise extorted from you when you were a child. Come now, let me give you a lesson. You'll learn directly. You're built just right for dancing." He put his arm around her waist and began to whistle a waltz.

She threw her arms around his neck. "Oh, Dick!" she exclaimed. "If you only knew how hard it is! I long to dance. And if I could only feel right about it myself, I shouldn't care in the least what anyone else might think about it. Dick, don't you have to make things square with yourself before you can do them?"

He took her face between his hands and kissed her. "Yes, I do," he said. "You're a brick, Isabel. But as soon as you feel differently about it, be sure and let me know. Because, you see, you are going to be dreadfully out of it in an army post."

"Let you know!" she cried. "Why, Dick, if I could feel differently about it I shouldn't give you a moment's peace. You'd have to teach me, morning, noon and night."

"I'll be ready, darling girl. And now, how about the hops? Do you want to go and look on, next Saturday, or shall we stay at home?"

"Oh, I'll go. I must see everything."

She went, gaily enough, and it did not at first strike

her that there was anything strange in Dick's sitting beside her without dancing. Many men came and stood for a few moments, or sat out a dance with her, and at those times Dick walked rather aimlessly away and talked to people here and there. Lily came up to her between two dances.

"How perfectly sweet for Dick to be so devoted," she said. "But it does seem queer not to have him dance. He loves it so. Are you going to make him give it up altogether?"

"I should never think of making him give it up," replied Isabel, with spirit. "I dare say he'll be dancing soon."

"It's so funny about you," pursued Lily. "I never expected you to be strict about such things after you left home."

"No," said Isabel. "I suppose not." She looked reflectively at Lily's blonde prettiness and recalled a remark of Cassie's. Cassie had said that Lily was "a sleek white cat."

Just then Lily was taken away by a partner and Dick came back to her. For the moment there was no one near them. After all, cat or no cat, she herself was being a selfish pig, which was just as bad. Poor Dick must be having a dull time of it; and besides, no one should think that she was keeping him from amusing himself. She told him that she wanted him to go and dance.

"What for?" he answered promptly. "I'd rather not, if you don't mind."

She smiled up at him. "You look so nice," she said. "Nicer than anyone here. And everyone says you dance better. I want a chance to admire you."

"I'm going to sit right here and make you say those things some more. There's no diet so agrees with me as flattery." He sat for a moment, glancing about the room. "Pretty to look at, isn't it? And by George, that music's good."

She regarded him with an amused smile. He was being perfectly heroic, poor dear. She rejoiced in his

willingness to sacrifice himself for her, but given the willingness, she could not think of actually accepting the sacrifice. She insisted and he demurred, until Colonel Raynor came and asked to sit out a dance with her. Then Dick left her for "just one dance."

"It really is fun to look on," said Isabel, not knowing that her wistful eyes betrayed her.

"You are a wise girl," said Colonel Raynor.

Veteran philanderer though he was under suitable circumstances, Colonel Raynor never trifled with married women. For some of them he had a genuine, kindly friendliness, as far as possible removed from flirting. A good friend Isabel always found him. She was well content as she sat beside him now; a contentment which had nothing to do with his rank or his distinction. True, she didn't succeed in giving him her undivided attention, but even when he saw that her eyes could not be kept from wandering to her husband as he passed her in his circling of the room, her inattention was not laid up against her.

When Dick came back to her Captain Horne was bowing and getting ready to take Colonel Raynor's place, so he consented to be sent away again, and seeing that she was never alone, he kept on dancing. Isabel tried to be interested in the various men and their conversation, but she was fancying herself among the dancers, always picturing herself as gliding easily and gracefully over the floor; as easily as Lily, but not in the same way. She found herself hating Lily's dancing, without quite knowing why. Lily's feet seemed all lightness, and the rest of her all languor. The men said she was a wonderful partner; and when she and Dick danced together some of the others paused to look at them.

Across the room, Isabel saw Frank watching them, his eager dark eyes following his wife intently. It struck her again, as it had done when she first saw them together, at the time of their wedding, that he seemed too vivid a personality for so slight a person as Lily. However, such charm as she had still appeared to hold him.

As the evening went on Isabel grew tired. Her eyes ached with the incessant circling movement; it was hard to talk or listen in such a noise; Dick and Lily waltzed together interminably. Before it was time to go home she had decided that, for a person who didn't dance, hops were tiresome—even rather hateful.

XLVIII

LUCKILY, dancing doesn't make up the whole of one's amusement at an army post. The great adventure of riding was at hand. Dick was fortunate to find just the right horse and bought it immediately.

"What a price!" exclaimed Isabel. "I had no idea horses cost so much."

"Horses don't," said Dick. "This horse does—and isn't dear."

"I'm afraid it's too good for a beginner."

"Not when you're the beginner. I only wish women had the sense to ride astride."

But Isabel did not wish so. She took the most naïve pride in her new habit, the best that could be got in New York, with its accompaniment of smart hat, gauntlets and riding crop. She had a good saddle, too—much better than she was yet able to appreciate. She was, to be sure, a little surprised when Dick, explaining its good points, dwelt entirely on the fact that it was so easy on the horse, hardly seeming to consider its comfort as a seat for her.

She looked complacently in her mirror when she was dressed for her first lesson, and then apprehensively out of the window at the horses, with the orderly standing at their heads.

"'Every prospect pleases,'" she quoted, in an attempt at light-mindedness, "but oh, Dick, I think I'm a little scared of the horse. He looks so appallingly powerful."

"No, you're not scared of him," said Dick with decision, "and he's powerful, but stupid. He doesn't know enough to oppose his power to your will, if only you know how to express it. Never forget that you are the boss. By the way, his name is Pat."

He had never spoken to her in just that tone before.

She cast a sidelong glance at him and vowed that never again would she confess to fear of a horse or anything else. She would live up to Dick. Incidentally, she meant to ride better than any woman at the post. But, standing beside Pat, she still regarded that superior animal with trepidation and wondered how in the world she was ever to get into the saddle.

"Come now, I'll put you up," said Dick.

She obeyed directions and placed her foot in his hand, wondering silently how that little bit of help was going to get the whole of her up. But when, at his command, she obediently straightened her knee and lifted herself, without even springing, as would have been her impulse, she found herself, by some miracle, in the saddle. Dick sorted the reins for her and put them into her hands, then walked around her, showed her how to rise in the stirrup and pull her skirt into place, and ordered her to sit up straight. Then he swung himself into his own saddle and they started at a walk, down the officers' row, past the verandah where Lily was watching, out toward the open country. Isabel felt a wild desire to cling to the pommel, but did not move her fingers from the position in which Dick had placed them.

"Drop your hands lower," he commanded. "Square your shoulders and straighten your back. Keep your elbows in and cheer up! Now you look all right—only you're as pale as a ghost."

"I'm all right," she said, breathlessly. She sat rigidly, in exactly the position he required, not daring to look either to the right or to the left.

"You look perfectly fine," said Dick, encouragingly.

"That may be so," she breathed to herself, "but it's a long way to the ground."

They kept their horses at a walk and gradually she began to breathe more freely.

"Now we'll trot a little," said Dick. They were out of sight of the post by this time. "Tighten your reins a bit and relax your body, so that you can rise with the horse."

She tightened the reins and Pat broke into a swinging trot, a beautiful easy trot, had his mistress but known it, but to her it was agonizing. Her body had remained as stiff as a ramrod, every muscle tense, and at each stride of the horse she seemed to go so far into the air as almost to lose her saddle, which at intervals she would find again with a most painful bump. It seemed to her sheer luck that it was underneath her each time that she came down.

"Relax! Relax!" cried Dick. "Let yourself go as if—as if you were dropping into an easy-chair."

She laughed almost hysterically and then, with a mighty effort of will, let her strained muscles relax, with the result that she felt herself jumping about loosely, almost as uncertainly as before, with a wobble substituted for the bump.

"I'm like a bag of meal," she said. They were the first natural words she had spoken.

"You have to relax intelligently." They dropped into a walk again. "Now try!"

She said to herself: "Of course I'm horribly afraid, but I'm going to do it just the same." By degrees she did better. "Am I getting the idea now?" she asked.

"You're getting it splendidly. But you mustn't keep it up too long the first time. We'll go home now."

At their own door she looked doubtfully from the horse to the ground. "Aren't you going to lift me off?" she asked.

"No, indeed."

But he showed her how to do it and she landed on her toes, lightly and safely. As they went up the steps Lily came strolling over from her own verandah.

"Sweet thing!" she said. "Were you as frightened as you looked? When you went past on your way out I thought you were going to faint."

"Can't imagine where you got such an idea," broke in Dick. "She just naturally rides. She'll outdo everybody after a while."

"Isn't he sweet, to be so proud of you?" said Lily.

Isabel thought he was, but didn't choose to say so,

or to mention how little ground he had for pride in her performance. "He's a good teacher," she said carelessly.

"And one ought to be able to learn to ride on such a lovely horse," added Lily. "Do let me try him some day when you're not going out."

But Dick had already said that no one else must ride Pat. There was an embarrassing little pause.

"Well," said Lily, not seeming to notice that she had received no answer, "I must be going back. Come over soon."

Isabel felt rather pleased with herself all day and was eager for the morrow, but that night she had horrible nightmares. She was falling—falling off a horse which was as high as a house, and Dick was standing by and saying, "No, I won't help you." Or the horse was trotting and throwing her up high into the air and Dick was saying, "Relax!" It was a relief to wake up in the morning.

She was sore and lame from her bumping and after such a night she thought she would be more afraid than the day before, but having made up her mind to pay no attention to fear, it gradually diminished, until, as the days and weeks went by, she forgot it altogether. To be sure, it was a breathless experience when she took her first lessons in jumping, but excitement helped her, and she came to love the sense of rising from the earth and the feeling of the tremendous effort which the powerful animal was making at her bidding.

"I believe you do the spectacular things the best," commented Dick one day after a particularly high jump.

"Doesn't one do best what takes one out of oneself? Or perhaps what brings applause? I'm a vain thing."

"You've something to be vain of. And you're not afraid any longer."

She turned on him. "Did I ever say I was afraid—after I once tried it?"

"You had too much pluck to say it, but bless you, did you suppose I didn't know it? It was perfectly fine, your going on and saying nothing. And now you ride like

a natural-born horsewoman. You have a good seat and good hands. From the first you've had good hands—as soon as you dared think they belonged to you. And you and Pat are understanding each other better every day. A little more experience and I'd trust you anywhere."

"I never was so proud in my life!" She turned a flushed, beaming face to him. "Oh—" with a long sigh—"there's nothing like conquering. Were you ever afraid, Dick?"

"Scared to death."

"What about?"

"Well, the time I remember best—" he stopped suddenly.

"Oh, go on! You've really got to tell me now."

"Oh, it wasn't much. We went out for an Indian who'd sworn to have my scalp and we had to go along through a narrow defile, one at a time, and I in front. I was fresh from the Academy then. One gets over it. One has to, you know."

"Yes, one has to. What happened?"

"Nothing—we didn't find him. All my funk was for nothing, you see."

"Does he still want your scalp?" she asked anxiously.

Dick grinned. "You needn't worry about that. Someone brought me his, one day."

"I'm glad of it!" Then she shivered slightly. "I hope you won't be sent out after Indians again."

He laughed shortly. "One takes what comes. Don't let's worry. Come on! I want to see you jump that ditch over there."

She had never taken such a long jump before, but she did it with spirit.

"Perfectly bully!" was Dick's comment, and her mind was diverted from Indians.

In fact, why should she think of them? Indian campaigning was something which, in her inexperience, seemed quite past as far as Dick was concerned. They were in a lovely place now and, although she had been told that they might have to leave it at any time, she

did not take the warning seriously. Permanence had been the keynote of her life in Ptolemy.

They trotted along peacefully and presently met Lily, riding with young Dakin, a boy in his first year out of the Academy. She was not well mounted. She was always lamenting to Isabel that she couldn't afford to buy a horse, but must take what she could get. However, she seemed to be enjoying herself.

"How do you think Lily rides?" asked Isabel.

"Oh, not very well. It isn't her accomplishment."

Isabel was about to say that dancing was her accomplishment, but decided not to. "She rides with Mr. Dakin pretty often," she said, "considering——"

"Considering nothing. What's the harm?"

"Well, she says Frank is so jealous."

Dick made a movement of vexation which caused his horse to swerve. He brought it back beside her and said rather hotly. "Don't talk like that! I hate gossip, and army gossip worst of all. For the Lord's sake, don't get into any of it."

"I don't," said Isabel, in a hurt tone. "It's only what Lily says to me herself. And I thought I could say things to you. Of course not to other people."

"I'm sorry if I was cross. You see, Frank is a sensitive fellow, and sometimes a little inclined to look on the dark side of things and to worry. But jealous—no! He's the best fellow in the world—and the best friend I have."

"He's too good for Lily," said Isabel shortly.

"Oh, come!"

"She'll torment the life out of him—and enjoy herself doing it."

"She's Frank's wife. Don't let's talk about her."

Isabel gave her head a little indignant lift. Then she turned and looked at Dick, and as she met the straightforward glance of his blue eyes she laughed, half angry still, but seeing the uselessness of anger.

"Your dislike of hearing anything unpleasant said about people is almost a monomania," she said.

"Perhaps it is." He spoke quietly and soberly now.

"When I was a boy I happened to hear some lies told about someone I cared for, and it gave me a hatred for talk of that kind—even if it happens not to be lies."

Isabel loved him the better for it. And anyway, she rode better than Lily.

There were moments when she needed the balm of that knowledge. The Saturday night hops always made her feel a little depressed, whether she went to them or stayed away. For, although Dick would not go without her, that made her uncomfortable; and when she went, it seemed as if Lily were always trying to show the whole room how admirable a couple they two were.

"So sweet of you to let me have him," Lily would say.

XLIX

THE riding was brought to an end by the doctor's orders. Isabel was going to have a baby.

This, she felt, was the most exciting adventure of all. Terrifying, as well. A baby, when it had once arrived, might be a very nice thing to have; certainly, she did not wish to be a childless woman, aside from the unfairness to Dick. But she shrank in mingled alarm and disgust from all that lay between the present moment and the finished accomplishment. Her alarm she could put aside more easily than her repugnance. An unceasing physical self-consciousness was horrible to her. Yet there were moments when she became aware of a queer, primitive pride in herself, a feeling that she was doing something wonderful—something which she was made for.

And then Dick was so sweet to her. Surely, it was worth while to put up with a good deal for the sake of that tenderness of love and care which transcended anything that she had yet known. She recalled Amy Boyd and her distress over the child which a poor professor could not afford to have. Looking around her, she saw poor army families in the same plight; and she was thankful from her heart that, at least, she and Dick need not have that cause of anxiety. She felt less warmth of gratitude when Lily pointed out her good fortune.

She had all, and more than all, of the shyness of her generation, and would have been glad to keep her secret from Lily and from everybody else, but unfortunately such secrets cannot be kept; and, in the fact that she refrained from mentioning the situation to Lily, the latter saw no reason for keeping silence.

"You sweet thing," she said. "It's so perfectly lovely. There's nothing I would like so much as to have children

—lots of them. Frank and I both adore them. But army officers who have to live on their pay never ought to have children. While they are lieutenants and captains they are too poor, and by the time they get to be majors they are too old to begin life that way. You are so lucky to have money enough not to have to think about that.”

Isabel was speechless with embarrassment and annoyance. She wished Lily would stop, but didn't know how to stop her.

“What is your number?” asked Lily, when she had said all the congratulatory things she could think of, and had made Isabel still more acutely uncomfortable.

“My number?” Isabel couldn't imagine what she meant.

“Yes. How many do you mean to have?”

“Oh, *don't!*” exclaimed Isabel.

And the next day Lily told Mrs. Bennett that it was too bad that Isabel felt so about having a baby. “Perfectly hates it, dear Mrs. Bennett. Simply can't bear to think of it or speak of it—even to me, and of course she would talk to me if she would to anyone. We've known each other all our lives. I think it's really wicked. I'm sure I would be glad enough if I were in her place. Nobody knows how Frank and I feel about it.” She sighed deeply.

Mrs. Bennett did not care particularly for Lily, but saw no reason to disbelieve her; and so she was unaware of the wistful, tentative advance which Isabel made to her one day. Isabel, in her supreme ignorance of everything connected with the affair, had thought that if she could once conquer her shyness, it would be a comfort to talk to Mrs. Bennett, a woman old enough to be her mother, and with a kind face and manner. She made a morning visit on purpose, but the major's wife seemed, to her sensitiveness, unresponsive, and she came away without speaking. Thrown back on herself, she made no further attempt to confide in anybody, while the ladies of the garrison, having been given to understand that the subject was taboo, carefully avoided ever leading up to it.

She was lonely enough, in spite of Dick. They had already begged Cassie to come and visit them and, for a while, had expected her. But Cassie did not come, and gave no very satisfactory reason. She was spending the winter in New York and seemed to be enjoying herself.

"If there were any special reason," said Dick, who was inclined to be a little aggrieved. Cassie had not been used to fail him.

"Perhaps there is," said Isabel. "You never can tell."

Meantime, however, Lily was constant in her visits. "I want," she said one day, "to make something pretty for little It. What would you rather have? What have you got?"

"I haven't got anything," said Isabel, and closed her lips firmly on that answer.

"But my dear!" Lily's dismay was genuine. Whatever might be her real feeling about babies, there was no doubt of her enthusiasm with regard to the clothes for them; and she loved to sew.

"I don't know anything about such things," said Isabel indifferently.

"You poor thing! You certainly do need help."

"Oh, no. It will all come right." Not for worlds would she have told that she was intending to arrange with Cassie to have the little wardrobe made and sent out to her. This, she felt, was no time for her to try her prentice hand at sewing.

So Lily, even while planning, with entire good will, to contribute her own beautiful needlework to the emergency, told Mrs. Bennett and others that Isabel so hated the whole thing that she would not even think about planning clothes for the baby.

To Isabel herself she said: "Sweet thing! You'll have to learn to be more practical than that."

Presently she broached another subject: "Frank can't go to the hop to-night," she said. "That strained knee bothers him and Dr. Kirby says he must keep quiet. He won't hear of my staying home, dear thing, but I won't go without a man. It's so stupid."

"Is it? You dance every dance whether Frank is there or not." Isabel was not particularly interested.

Lily cocked her blonde head on one side and held her work off at arm's length to admire it. "Sweet, isn't it?" she said. "I can't understand your not taking more interest—well, I know Dick is too devoted to go to hops just now, but we thought you would lend him to me for this evening. You wouldn't mind just one evening, would you?"

"Lend you Dick!" The color flamed in Isabel's cheeks. "Dick isn't a property to be lent by me. He does what he likes."

"And of course he likes best to stay home with you," said Lily sweetly. "But—oh, here he comes—dear me, it must be lunch-time. I had no idea it was so late."

Dick came briskly up the steps. "Good-morning, Lily," he said, perching himself on the verandah railing. "How's Frank? I heard his knee was bad."

"He's sitting with his foot up, poor darling, and insists on my going to the hop to-night without him. Of course, I'd rather stay with him, but he won't listen to it. He said, if you were going, perhaps you'd take me."

"I'd love to—but I don't go to hops. How about the Bettises?"

Lily made a little face. "I don't hang on to couples. Well, it's all right, and I'd so much rather stay home with Frank. I'll tell him you set me an example of devotion. If only he doesn't insist!" she sighed. "You know dear Frank is perfectly foolish about my doing what he thinks will be pleasant for me. Of course he'll understand your refusing."

Dick flushed. "There can't be any question of his understanding."

"Oh, I hope not," said Lily, gently. "I'll explain why my leap-year sort of request had to be refused. Frank is unreasonably sensitive, you know, and we mustn't always humor him."

Dick looked uncomfortably at Isabel. Whether or not there was a question in his glance, she read it there.

"I think you'd better go with Lily," she said. "It would be much the simplest thing."

"Sweet thing!" said Lily, leaning forward with her caressing touch.

Dick's face cleared. He ~~hated~~ the idea of the slightest misunderstanding and was too simply straightforward to suspect that Frank knew nothing of Lily's plan.

"If you really don't mind ~~my~~ leaving you," he said to Isabel. Then, turning to Lily: "You see, it's just as the missus says. It will give me pleasure to be a handy man, and I'll call for you."

But Isabel just then hated Lily; hated her caressing manner and her blonde beauty—and the grace of her slim form.

She did not sit up for Dick that night, but went to bed early. However, she was not asleep when he came in.

He slipped in softly, but seeing that her eyes were open, leaned over and kissed her. "Feeling all right?" he asked.

She put up her hand and stroked his hair. "It's all moist," she said. "You must have danced hard. Did you have a good time?"

"Bully. It always makes me warm, but Lily doesn't turn a hair. She's like thistledown, and just as cool and unruffled at the end of the evening as at the beginning."

"I'm glad you had a pleasant time." The slight stiffness was quite lost on him. "I think I'll go to sleep now."

No, she assured herself, as she lay awake in the darkness, she was not jealous. She could not be so utterly absurd as that. But she was teased, irritated, helpless.

L

OF course Lily came over in the morning. She took credit to herself for her daily visits. When she came in—as usual, without knocking—Isabel laid her pen down and self-consciously thrust a sheet of paper under her blotter. She was writing to Cassie about the things which she wanted sent.

“I want to tell you,” began Lily, “what a heavenly time I had last night. It was so sweet of Dick to take me and of you to let him go. And really, I think it did him good too. There’s nothing like dancing to freshen up your spirits. Frank says it pays him to do without me for a while to have me come back so livened up. Now, wasn’t it just that way with Dick?”

“Dick said he had a good time.” Isabel got up from her desk and, after a turn around the room, seated herself in a large wicker chair. She had on a pale pink morning gown in which Dick had told her that she looked lovely.

“That’s a sweet dress,” said Lily, looking her over with her competent, critical glance, “and a wonderful disguise.” She opened her work-basket and took out her sewing—the baby-work that she had volunteered to do. “Isn’t it sweet?” she said, holding up the little garment. “Why, I declare, it makes you blush just to look at it. I never saw anything like you.”

Isabel was flushing painfully and had a foolish desire to cry. She forced her voice to cordiality. “You do it exquisitely. I never saw such sewing.”

“I do sew pretty well,” said Lily, complacently. She took a few more stitches and, with her eyes still on her work, asked in a casual tone: “What are you going to do with your horse until you can ride him again?”

“Dick said he would arrange to have him taken care of.”

"I'd love to exercise him for you."

Isabel was furious with herself for not having said something—anything, to forestall this, and vexed at Dick for his procrastination about sending Pat away. "Nobody ever rides him but me," she said, not too graciously. "Dick said it was better for him not to be ridden by anyone else."

"Naturally—when you are riding him regularly. And of course I wouldn't for the world get on him if you would rather I wouldn't. Only Dick said—" She paused.

"What did Dick say?" asked Isabel, and then was sorry that she had spoken.

"Oh, nothing very much. We were talking about Pat, and he said it would be nice for me to ride him if you were willing—that I should ask you."

Isabel would have been less credulous if she had not still been a little sore from the evening before. Lily could wind Dick around her finger, she said to herself scornfully, and—well, if he had encouraged her to ask for the horse, nothing mattered very much.

"If Dick chooses to let you, I shan't say anything," she said.

Certainly, she was ungracious, but Lily was diplomatically impervious. With effusive thanks, she folded up her work and took her joyful way homeward.

All that day Dick wondered what was wrong. There was an aloofness in his wife's manner, an avoidance of his anxious attentions, which first distressed and then irritated him. When he asked her what was the matter, she replied, "Oh, nothing," with a bleak smile which signified—oh, everything. In short, as he put it to himself, she had no use for him. Well, he told himself reasonably, she was entitled to her moods. They were doubtless part of a state of things which he had already found less simple than he had ever supposed. But meantime, since he evidently only vexed her, he might as well take himself out of the way for a while.

"I think I'll go over to the club for a bit," he said casually.

"Yes," said Isabel, and was unable to think of anything further to say. But when he was gone she shed miserable tears. If she had looked out of the window she might have seen that he did not get to the club after all. As he passed Lieutenant Hazleton's quarters Lily called to him from the verandah and, after standing talking on the sidewalk for a few moments, he went up the steps and sat down beside her. After all, one place was as good as another. . . .

Isabel woke early the next morning and sat up in bed. The sky was deeply, beautifully blue; a rose-laden branch from the tall bush outside was pressing its pink sweetness against her window-screen. The world seemed made over afresh. Her sense of injury had somehow vanished. Doubtless, Lily had bamboozled Dick and he couldn't help it. Anyway, she wanted to be friends with him. When he came to her bedside all dressed for his morning ride she held out her arms to him and laid her cheek against his.

To him, yesterday was as if it had never been. "How I wish you could go with me, darling," he said, as he smoothed her hair.

"I wish so too," sighed she, but not unhappily. "Do you have to go alone?"

"Not this time. The Hazletons asked me to join them."

"Oh!" A shadow fell over her face. "Well, good-bye." Would Lily ride Pat? She would not ask.

"Take care of yourself." He closed the door softly and ran downstairs whistling.

She stayed in bed for breakfast and pretended to be asleep when Dick came up to see her. They met at luncheon and talked about one thing and another, until he presently said:

"I'm rather sorry that you let Lily ride Pat. She isn't going to do him any good. She jerks his mouth. How did you come to let her have him?"

"I let her have him?" cried Isabel indignantly. "It wasn't I, it was you."

"Me? I don't know what you are talking about."

The world suddenly seemed brighter. "I might have known! Now what *did* you say to her? She told me that you said it would be nice for her to ride him if I would let her—and that you told her to ask me."

"She misunderstood me. I dare say it was my fault, but I never meant her to get any encouragement from me. She asked me about it, and I simply said he was your horse and I didn't have the disposal of him. And I told her you were thinking of sending him out to Jenkins' ranch."

Isabel smiled at him teasingly. "You shirked and put it on my shoulders to refuse."

"Yes, I shirked," said Dick penitently.

"It was horrid of you. And yet, if——"

"If?"

"If I could keep Sam out of the room long enough, I'd run around there and kiss you. I haven't *really* kissed you since yesterday morning. I've been so furious at you for letting Lily have my horse and then going out riding with her."

"Good gracious!" said Dick, jumping up from his seat. "Never mind Sam!"

"Go back! There he comes! But to think—oh, just to think that I believed her—when I've always known she was a liar!"

"Oh, I don't suppose she meant to lie," said Dick easily. "She only misunderstood—and wanted to understand it her own way. We're all more or less like that."

"I believe," said Isabel, vexed, "that you'd stand up for the devil himself."

"Perhaps. There's no telling."

"And meantime, she's got to use poor Pat? Can't I get him away?"

"Certainly," he replied firmly. "Pat picked up a nail in his hoof this morning—can't be ridden for a month. Shockingly careless of the stable orderly, wasn't it?"

LI

THE next day's mail brought a piece of news which put everything else out of their heads. Cassie really had been getting herself engaged and, astounding to contemplate, engaged to Lansing Fordyce.

"But I've never seen the fellow," said Dick, in an injured tone.

"I have," said Isabel.

"What's he like?"

She had not thought of him for ages. It seemed queer now, to think of him as a brother-in-law. She ran her fingers up and down the arm of her chair and reflected for a moment before she spoke.

"It's some years, you know," she said. "Well, he's tall and slender and dark—I like blue eyes best——"

"Thanks. Go on."

"And aristocratic-looking. And his manners are—quite charming, I think."

"Sounds as if you didn't like him. What's the matter?"

"Oh, but I did like him immensely." She felt deceitful, but how, under present circumstances, could she tell him anything more? And really, there was nothing to tell, except that Lansing Fordyce had been a rather enterprising flirt and she had been a little fool. Yet somehow she felt as if there were a good deal of her past life which Dick did not know. She went on trying to elucidate him to Dick.

"I'm trying," she said, "to think what he was really like. Clever and delightful—and I do think you'll like him."

"Not fast or anything?"

"Oh, no. How could I tell? But I never heard so. And I do think you could trust Cassie."

She felt that she herself could trust Cassie. If, as she had always suspected, that intelligent young woman had divined something of what she had gone through, nobody would ever be the wiser. When Dick said that since the wedding was not to be before the next winter, they could go east for it, she wondered, a little, what it would be like to see Mr. Fordyce again. She thought she would like to have him see how happy she was. What she said was:

"I wonder what Father and Lydia will do about me if I go back there."

However, nothing mattered just now except this tremendous undertaking which she had on hand. And presently came other engrossing matters.

For one thing, Dick got his first lieutenantancy. Isabel, rejoicing with him, found her pleasure not at all enhanced by Lily's plaintive congratulations, coupled with a reminder that she and Dick did not need the increased pay as much as some other second lieutenants did.

Following directly on the promotion came orders for a change of station. B Troop was to be sent to a small post in Arizona, while C Troop, to which Lieutenant Hazleton belonged, was to be stationed at a much nearer point.

"For your sake," said Dick, "I could almost wish I were in Frank's place."

"Oh, I don't mind," said Isabel cheerfully, immensely relieved at the prospect of a separation from Lily.

"But it's a God-forsaken place and they tell me it's a beastly journey. I don't know whether you ought to undertake it. Perhaps I'd better send you east."

"I won't go! Don't other women travel? Aren't babies born everywhere? And besides, where could I go? You know my father and Lydia wouldn't have me, even if I were willing to go there."

"There's Cassie."

Isabel had her own reasons for being horrified at this suggestion. "What!" she cried. "Mix up our baby business with Cassie's love affair? Think how horrid for

her! And for me too! She's going to have a houseful of guests, and Mr. Fordyce coming and going. Why, this is her wonderful summer. Oh, Dick, a thousand times no!"

"I'm sure Dr. Brenton would be glad to have you go there."

"I know—but Dick, don't send me away from you." She put her arms around his neck and laid her head on his shoulder. "Dick," she whispered, "I can bear anything as long as you are with me. And the only place in the world where I want to be is where you are. I'll get along."

After all, other women did get along, as everyone knew; and of their special hardships Dick and Isabel were equally ignorant. Even the doctor's advice was not as emphatic as it might have been if he had ever taken that particular journey. To be sure, at the last minute Mrs. Bennett decided that she could not any longer refrain from telling that young thing how terribly imprudent she was in even thinking of such a thing as going just now, and went over to talk to her. It was too late for her advice to prevail, but she found Isabel touchingly grateful.

"If you had only known how I wanted to talk to you! I tried one day—but somehow I couldn't."

"My *dear!*" said Mrs. Bennett. "How sorry I am! I thought—we all thought you were unwilling to speak or to be spoken to about it."

"Not if it had been you," said Isabel.

They had a long, intimate, comforting talk, but still Isabel would not give up her intention of going with her husband. Other women did it, she said, and that, Mrs. Bennett, with all her head-shaking, could not deny.

So the preparations went on with all speed and, with the packing of the boxes and barrels, the spirit of adventure seized Isabel and she did not wholly regret leaving even an earthly paradise, innocently hoping to find charms in the new place. In this state of blissful ignorance she embarked at San Francisco on the steamer

which was to carry them on the first stage of their journey. That first stage lasted a fortnight. Two weeks of intense, overpowering heat, of provisions gradually spoiling, so that toward the end one went hungry, sickened by the noisome odors of the food which must needs be prepared, even though no one could eat it.

"We've left Paradise and we're going through purgatory," said Isabel, as she turned in languid disgust from the breakfast which had been brought to her as she sat on deck under an awning. "What is it going to be next, Dick?"

"Two of the soldiers died in the night," said a woman who was lying stretched out in the steamer-chair next to her.

Isabel closed her eyes and reached out for Dick's hand. In his heart he damned the other woman. Looking at her pale face, he said remorsefully, "I ought to have sent you east. We could have found some place."

"I'll be all right when we get off this boat," she answered.

But after that there was another boat; a boat which was tied up to the river bank at night and only went on during the hot, interminable days. Isabel had never imagined such heat. The diet of salt beef, dry biscuits and strong black coffee was next to impossible to her and she felt ill and weak. All day she lay on her steamer chair and during most of the time was glad to close her eyes to the view of desolate flat desert lands and the red seething waters of the Colorado River. But behind those closed eyes and underneath that deadly sense of sick exhaustion her spirit was unbroken. If not for herself, then for the baby that was coming, she must rally all her vital forces to surmount this terrible journey. "Don't worry about me," she said to Dick, as he hung over her. "It's too hot to worry about anything. Just mop your poor dear face and keep quiet. It will all be behind us sometime."

But it seemed as if they were to go on forever, after a week had passed and they were still not near the end

of this stage of their journey. It was toward the end of the second week of it when they at last left the steamer and rested themselves at a friendly post, where the kind officers and their wives did everything for them that hospitality could suggest, before starting them off again.

Isabel had thought that traveling in the comfortable carriage, which they had bought in San Francisco, would be a delightful treat, after the recent experience, and camping out at night sounded romantic and refreshing. When the long train started out her spirits had quite revived. The carriage, with its six mules seemed to her a most luxurious equipage. To be sure, Dick could not travel with her, as he had to ride with his troop, but she had invited nice, friendly Mrs. Betts, the wife of the captain of Troop B, to drive with her. "Get the best-natured woman you can find," Dick had counseled her. "You'll find the trip a strain on the disposition."

Mrs. Betts fulfilled the requirement and the friendship begun on that journey was never quite broken, even after years of separation.

"Why haven't I known you better before this?" Isabel would say.

"You were somewhat monopolized," Mrs. Betts once answered.

"I didn't want to be," Isabel replied quickly. "Anyway, that's past." And indeed, she felt that, as regarded comradeship, her army life was just beginning.

But between hot winds and driving sand during the day, and the horrid fear of snakes at night, the trip was not by any means what her fancy had pictured it. As day followed day, with its routine of making and breaking camp, its heat and sandstorms and snakes, and always the same desolate scenery, Isabel began to wonder whether they were ever going to get anywhere.

"I feel," she said to Mrs. Betts, "as if I belonged to a nomadic tribe—only if we did, I think we might perhaps choose a better country."

"They say we are going to get to a better country,"

said Mrs. Betts. "And for that matter, we *are* nomads, we army people."

They got to the better country soon; a land of grass and trees and game; restful to the eyes and comforting to the appetite. Again a break in the journey and a short stop at another comfortable army post, and then on again; on through a wilderness where the carriage pitched and tossed over rocks and fallen trees, and swayed on the brink of precipices; where the nights were cold and a stove was set up in one's tent; where bands of hostile Indians roved and no one could wander far from camp, and where every night held its terrors. Isabel had her own pistol and Dick had taught her how to use it. She knew that its possible use might be to put an end to her own life if there should be at any time a certainty of capture by Indians of a most cruel tribe. She refused to think of the possibility and kept the pistol out of sight. And at last they arrived at their destination.

It was in a log cabin that the Maldens once more set up their household possessions—such of them as were left after the mischances of the journey. There were enough, however, for the smaller quarters, and Isabel cared little just then for breakages and losses.

LII

ISABEL'S spirit had been more enduring than her body. There came, all too soon, a dreadful day and night when, as in a nightmare, she was aware of a strange doctor, of Dick's anguished face, of Mrs. Betts's cheerful, courageous help, before she became unconscious altogether and knew nothing of the fight that was being made to save her.

When, at last, she opened her eyes again and mistily saw her husband's face she had forgotten, for the moment, what it was all about. She wondered weakly why, when Dick leaned over her, a drop of water fell on her face. He kissed her and she wished he wouldn't. She wanted all the air. She closed her eyes again. . . .

Later, when she came back to life, she found that her untimely baby had been born dead.

LIII

When, in the winter, Dick took his leave and they went to Cassie's wedding, Isabel found herself relieved from a very considerable source of embarrassment. Her father and his wife were no longer living in Ptolemy. This was a thing which she could never have anticipated, for however movable she herself might have become, it seemed against nature that anyone but her father should be living in the old parsonage on the hill.

Indeed, it had seemed somewhat that way to William Stirling himself. When he accepted a professorship in a theological seminary he felt that it was an admission of defeat; an admission which was not rendered less bitter by the consciousness that such a position would be more congenial to his present taste than the pastorate. To instill a knowledge of Hebrew into the minds of young men seemed to him a less exalted vocation than to instill the fear of God into their souls, but he knew himself competent to do the one and felt that he had failed in the other. He was a fighter and he had been beaten. He was sore, too, over the knowledge that his people, among whom he had worked for so many years, were ready for a change. They deprecated his resignation half-heartedly and as a matter of form, but carefully avoided asking him to reconsider it. He bade them good-bye in bitterness of soul. And yet, to his surprise, when the break was once made, he confronted the new career in a more adventurous spirit than he would have thought possible, and felt himself more in his element among the young theologues than with the good sisters of his congregation.

As for Lydia, although, as a matter of course, she overflowed with all the proper platitudes of parting, she was delighted. True, a theological seminary was not a uni-

versity, but it was a step in that direction. She would now be, as she expressed it to herself, "one of the faculty."

And so Isabel could go with an easy mind to stay in her father-in-law's house. She had dreaded Peter Malden a little and was surprised to find how much she liked him. He seemed to her much older than when she had last seen him, his broad shoulders bent and his heavy figure somewhat shrunken. He had grown absent-minded and his eyes looked tired, although they lighted up with pride and affection when they rested on his son. He was gentler than she had supposed and his years of prosperity and of contact with the world had smoothed off most of his superficial roughness. He had never been rough at the core. He was kind to her, not talking much to her, but evidently anxious to make her feel that she, no less than Dick and Cassie, was a child of the house. In some incomprehensible way, he touched her heart, and the pretty deference of her manner to him was entirely spontaneous. It pleased him and delighted Dick and made Cassie take her quite unreservedly to her heart.

Cassie was frankly happy, although she had not attained happiness without some doubts and questionings. Lansing Fordyce had not found her easy to win. She could not forget that she had been almost won before, and she was wary of him and of herself. As for him, he had long ago persuaded himself that his brief infatuation for Isabel had been caused by Cassie's inaccessibility, that, in short, it was all her fault.

"I've waited for you a good while," he said to her. "You nearly drove me into making a fool of myself once"—and that was the only allusion ever made to that affair.

Cassie smiled at his dexterity; hesitated, half thought she would turn her back on him and go to visit Dick and Isabel; then silently forgave him, quite aware that she had something to forgive. "But then, I'm not perfect myself," she thought. Moreover, whatever wounds Isabel had sustained were quite healed and forgotten.

Cassie believed that Lansing loved her now. Whether

or not he had at first cared unduly for her father's money, he had by this time become too successful for that to be much of a consideration. His career was well started and he was a rising man and one of whom much was expected by the older men in his profession. And as for herself, she knew that, down in the bottom of her heart, she had always cared. Nevertheless, she could not help having a certain curiosity to see what effect Isabel would have on him now, and thought she would rather have them meet on the day before the wedding than on the day after.

For his part, he took no interest in the prospective meeting. Why should he? One doesn't get excited over the recollection of every pretty girl with whom one has had a passing flirtation. He had more than half forgotten the incidents of that episode, and would have been surprised if he had known that Cassie gave it a thought; equally surprised if he had suspected that to Isabel there was excitement in the prospect of the meeting. Isabel knew that he had behaved horribly. She could not be thankful enough that the affair had ended as it did and that she was married to Dick, but no woman is going to be quite indifferent to a meeting, after the lapse of years, with a man—especially the first man—with whom she has fancied herself in love.

It was on the day before the wedding that he arrived. Cassie saw him in the drawing-room, but presently took him into the library, where Isabel and Dick were unpacking presents. Dick, who was near the door, came forward and greeted him with the external cordiality which the occasion demanded and the inward critical interrogation of the brother who confronts for the first time his sister's prospective husband. One could hardly expect that he would be quite good enough for Cassie. However, the first impression was a favorable one. In looks and manner Fordyce pleased him. Unconsciously he exhaled a breath of relief as Isabel, dropping a mass of tissue paper and still holding a bronze card-receiver, came toward them. "I believe you know my wife," said Dick.

Even beauty has its off days. To be sure, Isabel was never less than beautiful, but she had her more perfect times, and her great moments of radiant loveliness; moments when one caught one's breath. This, from whatever reason, was not one of her best days. However, she was not thinking about her looks. Never, even at worst, having any real cause for dissatisfaction, she could well afford to be unconscious. Her eyes were filled with curiosity, but her manner was careless. Perhaps that carelessness was a little conscious.

"I'm glad to see you again," she said banally, as they shook hands.

He seemed to her at the same time unchanged and unfamiliar. In that unfamiliarity was the measure of her own change since she had last seen him. If some small portion of herself had been held in bondage, not by him but by the fact of the old infatuation, she was now set free. Not that she was consciously free any more than she had been consciously bound. She only felt elated and inclined to talk nonsense.

His manner was quite all that it should be, but Cassie, studying the two, was fully aware of their entire indifference to each other. Lansing was really more interested in Dick than in Dick's wife.

"You have fourteen card-receivers," said Isabel, exhibiting the latest one. "What in the world are you going to do with them?"

She turned to Fordyce. "You know," she said, "a card-receiver seems to me the most useless thing one can have. We live in a log cabin and don't even have a doorbell. Some of the Ptolemy people insist that we draw rations and all eat at the same mess, and they won't believe me when I tell them that we don't, and that we have dinner parties even if we don't have doorbells."

"And you like the army life?" said Fordyce, for the sake of saying something. Her interests were, he fancied, at the opposite pole from his.

"I love it! There's nothing like it!"

Her enthusiasm struck him as schoolgirlish. He

looked from her to Cassie and contentment possessed his soul. Isabel was lovely to look at; Cassie was pleasing, but not beautiful. Although he had once, for a short time, been attracted by Isabel's youthful naïveté—the naïveté of a very young girl who has seen nothing, known nothing and is developing from moment to moment—the kind of woman he preferred to all others was the finished woman of society; finished, but sincere; and that was Cassie. He somewhat cruelly characterized Isabel as half-baked; a handsome young woman who had known nothing of life outside of a central New York village and a frontier army post; clever enough to learn, possibly, if she had the chance, but Cassie had already learned. Cassie would be in her element anywhere, could be relied on to say and do the right thing, would always be a help to him. Give him Cassie. Dick was welcome to the Beauty.

And so the little fear passed away from Cassie and her wedding day was not shadowed by any misgiving. . . .

On the evening of that day, after the newly married pair had left and the house was quiet, Dick had the long talk with his father for which there had hitherto been no opportunity. He was anxious about his father, wanted to find out the cause of his changed looks and manner, but was unwilling to ask questions. They were sitting in front of the fire in the library, saying little, from time to time flicking the ashes of their cigars on the hearth. Presently Peter Malden, with a gesture of decision, tossed his cigar stump back of the logs and turning, faced his son.

"Dick," he said, "I've made a damn fool of myself."

Dick took his cigar out of his mouth and held it between his fingers. "I don't see you doing that," he said, his eyes meeting his father's with friendly sympathy. "But I've seen that something worries you, and if you don't mind telling me——"

"It's due to you to tell you. I've tangled up my money matters pretty badly."

He tapped the arm of his chair with his big fingers and Dick pushed the cigar box within easier reach.

"You see," Peter Malden went on, "when Farrell put this university in one of the most unget-atable places in the State—Simeon Farrell's a wonderful man, Disk. Perfectly unselfish, way up in the skies with his plans to help all the poor young men in the world, but not very practical. I'm not very practical either, it seems. You know I really got rich more or less incidentally. Simeon Farrell's a man I love, and I wanted to help. I'd helped with the charter and other things. So when we got the town bonded and taxed up to its eyes for these three branch railways Farrell took a lot of the bonds. I took a lot of 'em too—not so many as Farrell, but a lot. He sold out his good investments. So did I. He borrowed money to finish the railroad he had pledged himself to finish and I followed suit. Seemed as if we had to get the job done. Well—" He threw out his hands and let them drop heavily—"I'm likely to die a poor man."

"Poor or not," said Dick heartily, "I'm proud to be your son. As to the money, I don't see why it won't work out all right in time."

"Not in time for me, Dick. I'm a sick man." He put out his hand and took a cigar from the box, saying as he cut off the end of it, "Doctor says I smoke too much, but what difference does it make?" He held the cigar unlighted in his fingers. "The thing that torments me is that I've been so damned unfair to you and Cassie. I hadn't any right——"

"You had every right," said Dick firmly. "You have been more than generous to Cassie and me. You gave her just what you gave me, and I have my profession. I owe you that too. So now you'll just let me give you back the money you gave me after I was married. I've four out of the five thousand too that you gave me when I came and told you I was going to be married. I invested it—and it's at your disposal with the rest."

"Good Lord, boy, no!" exclaimed his father. He lighted his cigar and leaned back in his chair. "Thank the Lord, I did give you both something. I've enough

to live on and pay my interest, but there'll be an ungodly amount of claims on my estate. And I meant to leave you rich."

"We don't want to be rich. And at least, won't you come back with Isabel and me? We'd love to have you—both of us."

"Thank you, Dick. I like to believe you would—both of you. I'm fond of your Isabel. She's the right stuff. But no, Dick, I couldn't do that. And your Aunt Mary will stay here for a while."

"Wouldn't your health be better for a change?"

"Oh, my health. Well—perhaps Brenton gives me the dark side in hopes of scaring me into following his trumpery rules. Anyway, I've had a pretty good time. Lord! When I think what I started from and how I've got on! But mind you, Dick, there was good stuff back of us, even if it wasn't aristocratic," He drew a long breath. "Now that I've got this off my mind, I believe I'll cheat Brenton and get well and leave you and Cassie a pot of money yet."

"What does he say is the matter?"

"Oh—he talks. It's all right. Let's go to bed. It's been a long day." He pulled himself out of his arm-chair and stood up.

"Father," said Dick, standing in front of him. "Suppose I resign my commission and work here with you to get you out of this financial mess. I think I could be a help."

Peter Malden turned on him sternly. "Not a word more of that, Dick. I thank God you have your profession and are a credit to the country which has trained you for its work. Your country educated you. Peter Malden, rich as he was then, didn't do it. And it's to your country you owe yourself. Good-night, Dick. And God bless you, my boy, for being willing to sacrifice yourself."

When Dick went to his room after saying good-night to his father, he found Isabel, wrapped in a pink dress-

ing gown, sitting on the sofa under the gaslight, with a book on her lap.

"Why did you stay up?" he asked; adding, "but I'm glad you did."

"I thought you would be. I knew you'd want to talk before you went to sleep."

He sat down beside her and told her all that he had learned about his father's affairs and his anxiety about his father's health. "Of course I'll see Brenton tomorrow," he said.

She listened sympathetically, her hand in his. "It was splendid of him," she said, "even if it wasn't practical. And of course you couldn't do anything but offer to give him back the money he gave you."

"I knew you'd agree with me," said Dick. "And when I told him I'd resign from the army and come here to help pull him through——"

"Dick!" She straightened herself with a gasp, pulling her hand away with a jerk. The blood rushed to her cheeks and she gazed at him with incredulous, indignant eyes. "But you couldn't——"

"Yes, I thought I ought. I owe him all I can do for him."

"Even to giving up your career!" She spoke with a bitterness which was lost on him, absorbed as he was in the thought of his father.

"If necessary," he said simply.

"And I —oh!" She choked down tears of angry dismay. "You simply can't! Give him the money, of course, but not——"

But not our lives, was what she would have said, but Dick stopped her.

"He wouldn't have it. He was just as cross with me as you are. Said the Government had educated me and I belonged to the country and hadn't any right to think of leaving the service. He was tremendously fine about it—and I know just what it would mean to have me here."

They were tears of relief now, and she let them fall.

"Oh, he was—he *was* fine," she said. Her voice broke. "And you were fine too, Dick. But oh, don't think of doing it, for I—I'm the only one among you that isn't fine, and I couldn't bear it!"

But still Dick did not realize that it was for herself that she couldn't bear it.

LIV

WHEN, on the following Sunday morning, Isabel went to St. James's with Dick and his father, she reflected with some surprise that it was the first time they had ever been to church together. At their present post they had no chaplain and before that, directly after they were married, she had enjoyed her emancipated Sundays too much to care to curtail her pleasure in them. Dick had gone occasionally, compelled, she thought, by a feeling that to put in an appearance now and then was part of his job. Now she went with a little of the excitement of tasting forbidden fruit. How disapproving some of her father's former parishioners would be! Then her memory went back to the time when she had driven with Margaret to the little church in the village near Mornington. How the service had thrilled her that day! She remembered the little prayer book, with the Latin prayer penciled in Margaret's handwriting on the flyleaf.

The service did not exactly thrill her now, but she liked it; and she liked Dr. Harrison, who must be forever associated with the greatest day of her life. As to Dr. Harrison's sermon, she did not find it interesting, but she could always practise her old trick of keeping her eyes fixed on the preacher, while detaching her mind so completely as not to hear a word that he said. To-day she was wondering what Dick really thought about religion, a subject which they seldom mentioned. Not that they avoided it, but it didn't seem to come in. She had, to be sure, told him about her early experiences and how religion had been made a bugbear to her all her life, and he had listened with sympathy and indignation, but had apparently had nothing of any sort to tell about himself in that connection. Now she wondered. Later, she said to him:

"Does religion mean anything to you, Dick? You weren't taught to hate it, but is it a thing you ever think about?"

"Why," said Dick, taken by surprise and searching his mind to find out what he did think, "of course it means something. Aunt Mary used to tell us Bible stories when we were kids—and then there was Christmas. I think we were quite religious about Christmas time. As to thinking about it now, I don't suppose I do, very often."

"But you believe in God, and Heaven and Hell?"

"Well now, I just don't believe in any everlasting Hell—perhaps a temporary one when necessary—but an everlasting Hell would be too darned unfair. Yes, I believe in some kind of Heaven, and surely I believe in a God. But Isabel, I doubt if I know many more answers to your catechism."

"But just this—I know very well you don't believe in my father's kind of God. But does your kind that you don't often think about, have any sort of effect on you?"

Dick reflected a moment before he answered. Then he said: "I suppose it's mostly indirect and unconscious, but after all—I think perhaps the knowledge that there's a—Critic—and perhaps—an Encourager, would make it a little harder not to be a decent sort of chap."

"I see. It's just whether you have the standard set up for you, or whether you set it up for yourself. Whether somebody outside of you approves or disapproves, or whether you like yourself a little more or a good deal less. One thing is quite certain. You live up to your standard better than I live up to mine."

"What nonsense!"

"Oh, Dick! It's good for the soul to live with you."

She sighed and wished she could be as unselfish as he and as free from self-consciousness. She was ashamed of her anger at his willingness to sacrifice himself—and her—for his father, yet knew she would be still angry if he had had to do it.

After all, however, seriousness was not the dominant note of her visit. There were many pleasures, much re-

newing of old ties. It seemed like going to a home of her own when she went to Dr. Brenton's house.

"It's so good to have you for an uncle," she said to him one day. "It's such a thoroughly nice relationship. Why didn't we begin when I was little? You don't know how I needed an uncle then."

Dr. Brenton sighed and then smiled. "It wasn't my fault," he said. "Your Aunt Eliza was the only woman I ever wanted to marry, and she wouldn't have me."

"Oh!" cried Isabel. She went over to him, as he sat in his chair facing her, and kissed him on the forehead. "How could she not want you?"

"She did, rather, at one time," said the doctor dryly, "but her creed, backed up rather vigorously by William Stirling, decided her against me. I was regarded as an Unbeliever. And there is a Scriptural command, more effective then than now, not to be "unequally yoked."

"I can hardly imagine it of Aunt Eliza, strict as she was. She certainly wasn't as rigid as that in those last years. And she trusted you more than she did Father when she gave you charge of the money for me. I wish you had known her better then. Oh, it's a shame—poor Aunt Eliza!" The sharpness of her sympathy for them both brought the tears to Isabel's eyes.

"Well—it's all irrevocable now. And you are my dear niece."

The adoptive relationship was thenceforth more tender than ever. And there were other pleasures. There were long delightful hours with Mrs. Gifford. Edmund still lived at home, to the infinite satisfaction of his parents. He liked women's society and was a petted guest in many houses, but showed no inclination to marry. He was a full professor now, at the head of his department, and had recently published a book of clever essays, comments on life, spiced with wit and amiable malice. The critics praised it.

"There's no money in such a book," said Mrs. Gifford, "but then Edmund needn't mind that and can write to please himself."

The Giffords gave a dinner for her and she was placed at Judge Gifford's right hand, and he talked to her with an intelligent interest in army life and army work, and in the Indian question, so vital to these keepers of the outposts, so indifferently regarded by the dwellers in a country town in central New York.

"It's you army people who have to pay for the Government's mistakes with the Indians," he said.

After dinner Edmund sat down by her and told her all the university news and was caustic about the admission of "co-eds." She laughed at him and pretended to regret that she could not have been a co-ed herself. When she told him that she had not yet seen his book he promised to give her a copy.

"With your name written in it," she stipulated.

"Certainly—although you hardly deserve it," he said.

"You never did anything like that for me."

She blushed furiously and had no reply ready.

"Are you writing an army story?" he asked, with a sly smile.

"What an absurd idea!" She glanced hastily around to make sure that no one was listening to them. . . .

She went, one day, to see her old friends, the Boyds, and recalled with secret merriment her make-believe at being their sister. Oh, if she could only tell them! If only she could own up to the book!

Amy Boyd had three children now and looked haggard and shabby. She worked very hard and the Professor apparently spent all his evenings alone in his study. Amy held the baby on her lap while they talked. She was affectionate, but preoccupied. Isabel began to feel that they hadn't much in common.

"Do you remember Mrs. Henderson?" asked Amy suddenly. "She died last year. I suppose she really died of fatigue and discouragement. Do you remember that day when she said that a professor ought to marry his cook?"

"Yes, I remember it very well."

"And how mad I got? And how I was going to show

them 'the marriage of true minds'? Well—she was right. A man like my husband can't let his mind be married. It's got to work alone. And his body has got to be fed and made comfortable, and its needs—all its needs, sufficiently satisfied for him to forget it when it needs to be forgotten. Which is most of the time. Of course, if they have no children—that was one of Mrs. Henderson's alternatives. But after all—" she looked thoughtfully at the baby on her lap—"after all, Isabel, if a woman doesn't have children, what's the use of her, except just to cook?"

"I suppose," said Isabel, feeling very inadequate, "that they do pay for themselves." She, too, looked at the baby, which was a healthy specimen, but not particularly attractive.

"Oh, I don't mean as a matter of affection," said Amy scornfully, "but as a matter of significance. When I die, I shall have meant something. If only they turn out well."

"Amy," said Isabel, "can't you ever have any good times? Don't you want to?"

"Of course I want to," flashed Amy. "I'm a human woman—and I'm young. But there isn't any money for good servants and enough of them, and without them I've no strength left for amusement—not to speak of money for decent clothes."

Isabel thought of certain hard-worked army women with an overplus of children and decided that they had a much better time of it than professors' wives. In spite of hard journeys there was some relief in moving on, and they got some fun as they went along. And always they were automatically moving up in the scale. There seemed no certainty of promotion in civil life, and much less amusement to be had without spending money.

How these scenes and people recalled the Book! In the stirring experiences of the last year and a half she had seldom thought of it. Now she felt again that she would like to tell Dick about it. It seemed the queerest thing in the world that she had not yet told him. One

rainy day when they were sitting in the library and Peter Malden was shut up in his little office at the end of the hall, she looked along the bookshelves for a copy which she remembered having seen there. Having found it, she took it out, flicked off the dust and carried it over to Dick.

"Did you ever read this?" she asked.

He took the book and glanced at the title. "Don't think so. Why?"

"Everybody here was reading it at one time."

"I wasn't here, I suppose. I don't think I ever heard of it."

She felt unreasonably disconcerted. "It was supposed to be a story of Ptolemy," she said, after a moment's hesitation.

"That sounds interesting." He opened it at the first chapter.

Yes, she would let him read it before she told. He lighted a pipe, settled back in his chair and began to read. She waited, pretending to be interested in a magazine. Dick seemed absorbed, but made no comments. She had hoped that he would speak of anything that struck him. He read all the afternoon. At dusk he had not finished, but he laid the book down and lighted a fresh pipe. Isabel still waited.

"Does anyone know who wrote it?" he asked. "I don't suppose the name on the title page means anything."

It was on the end of her tongue to say—I wrote it—but she checked herself. First let him say what he thought of it.

"I believe not," she said demurely. "I don't think it has ever been known."

"No, it wouldn't be apt to be acknowledged."

"Why? Don't you like it?"

"It hits out considerably at university management. I dare say it was all true but it mightn't have been quite safe, if it was written by anyone on the inside, as I dare say it was. It sounds as if some professor's wife had tried to get even."

Isabel's cheeks burned. "Do you think the characters are portraits?" she asked.

"I can see a couple. Probably there are more. I don't know people here so very well."

He picked up the book again, looked at the date, then turned over some of the leaves. Isabel saw him grin as he stopped to read a page. She got up, sauntered over to him and stood behind his chair. He was reading one of the passages where Lydia figured. He shut the book quickly and she went and sat down again.

"But aside from portraits, how do you like it? What do you think of it?" Her tone was carefully indifferent.

"Oh, it's amusing in spots—cleverish. It's as if a bright woman sat down and hit off the people around her—not very goodnatureedly. I hate ill-nature, and so I don't care very much for the book."

Cleverish! She had been prepared to confess her naughtiness, but—cleverish!

"The book sold very well. There were some good reviews of it," she said, in a subdued tone.

"I suppose a book of that kind would sell well just at that time," said Dick, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "It's readable. Farrell University was new and there were enough people down on it to be amused by a book that showed up its weak points. I can understand that. And after all, I'm no critic. I simply don't care much for it myself. But then, I don't care for lots of things that my betters like."

Isabel picked up the book and started toward the book-case. "It's ages since I read it myself," she said, pausing in the act of returning it to its place. "I think I'll look at it again. Do you know it's almost dinner-time?"

"That's a fact," said Dick, glancing at the clock. "I'll get a breath of air before dinner. Want to come?"

"It's raining too hard." She tried not to make her tone curt.

She watched him as he put on his storm-coat and went out, and then went slowly upstairs with the book in her hand. Tell Dick? Never!

At her first opportunity she read it, slowly, carefully. Her eyes were opened to a thousand defects and crudenesses. She saw too that her youthful indignation at what she was told were mistakes and injustices in university management might strike Dick as ill-natured, and even that she might have been ill-informed and unjust in some instances—but not in all. But it was a new idea to her that she had played into the hands of the enemies of the university. Not that it made any difference. The university was not to be hurt by her pygmy blows.

But her portrait of Lydia! That, she saw, was unpardonable. She told herself scornfully that it was not only a hateful, but a common thing to do. But—it wasn't "cleverish," that portrait. It was dreadfully clever. A thrill of exultation shot through her shame and remorse. If she was clever enough for that! . . .

But was it wrong to go on keeping the thing a secret from Dick? She hated having a secret from him. More and more, she was getting into the way of thinking aloud with him, no matter whether he always understood or not. She did not want to tell him this. Therefore, said her inherited puritanism, probably she ought to. With an effort she put puritanism away from her. Would Dick rather know or not? Wasn't the telling going to be as unpleasant for him as for her? He would be sorry he had said what he did about the book, and yet he would have to stick to it. He would be still sorrier that she had written it, and horribly shocked at her for having put Lydia into it. He might grin at somebody else's portrait of her, but that was different. No, Dick would not be proud of her. Possibly it might be better for her own soul to confess and show him her meanness, but she doubted whether it would be better for him. He would wish she hadn't told him.

Perhaps she was wrong. Perhaps she was weakly sparing herself. Perhaps he would find it out some day, and then it would be better to have told him. She didn't know. The only thing she really did know was that it would be pleasanter for Dick not to be told; and so she

would take the risk of his finding out, and bear the burden of keeping a secret from him.

But reading the book over had aroused her writing instinct. She longed to be at it again and wondered why she had not felt that way before; although, to be sure, life had been, so far, pretty full. But there was going to be so much time out at the post, and how she would love to write a novel of army life. But she would not conceal anything from Dick, and he would not like it at all, no matter with what affection she treated her subject nor how impersonal she tried to be. It would be sure to strike him as being in the nature of the army gossip that he hated. No, she would have to find some other subject, and even then, she doubted whether he would be in sympathy. And he might even suspect her of this first disastrous book. It would hardly be safe. She sighed with vexation, then told herself that, after all, one couldn't have everything; and, having Dick, surely she had the best that life could give.

LV

THREE years more of Arizona, years marked by the change from a log cabin to a low adobe house, as B Troop moved from one hot post to another, but otherwise much the same in the orderly routine of garrison life. They were years in which Isabel seemed almost to forget that she had ever lived any other life than the one punctuated by the morning and evening gun and the bugle calls. She adapted herself easily to the makeshift existence of the frontier post, learned to do without the appurtenances of civilization, and to make light of the loss and breakage of the household gods which she had so recently learned to adore, grew hardened to the publicity of sleeping on the parade ground when the little houses were too hot to be endured, and spent many a night under the stars, sleeping or waking, as the case might be.

It was a life quickened by the sense of danger; a danger which her spirit could face when she shared it, as, on some of their journeys through a country infested by hostile Indians, she had to do, but before which she quailed when Dick went off on expeditions to hunt up and drive back those Indians who forsook the reservation for the warpath, leaving her in the idleness and safety of the post, to eat her heart out with anxiety until his return. But through it all, she more and more loved the life, with all its uncertainties and discomforts. More and more she thrilled to the sound of the bugle and the sight of the soldiers. Guard mounting and dress parade, all the recurring spectacles of each day, never ceased to touch a responsive nerve. For there was nothing about it which was merely spectacular. Reality lay behind it all. It angered her to think how little people back in the east realized the grim seriousness of a soldier's busi-

ness in the Indian country; how little indeed, they honored him when he fell in some obscure combat; a combat brought on, very possibly, by a policy of which she saw clearly the injustice or the folly. Truly, there was no glory in Indian warfare. She learned to say bitterly, as other army women have said before and since: "Nobody cares!"

Perhaps nothing so much as this recurring danger would have so kept alive the romance of her love for her husband. Those ever-dreaded perils kept its first freshness untarnished. There had not been any further promise of children, but as yet, in their youth and their enjoyment of comradeship the more intimate because thus uninterrupted, neither of them could feel that they missed anything. And how well they learned to know each other! With a knowledge which, it seemed, precluded all possibility of future misunderstanding.

In these days Isabel learned to know and love her army comrades; the group of women who, with indomitable pluck, met the emergencies of each day as it came, putting yesterday behind them, and taking to-morrow's chances philosophically. She had her own place among them now, as she had never had it when Lily stood between, with her half malicious, half unconscious mischief-making.

In the midst of all this came the news of Peter Malden's fatal illness and the summons home. There was the hurried start and the long journey which could not be hurried and seemed to their impatience beset with even more vexations and delays than usually befell. Peter Malden was dead when they at last arrived.

Dick felt his father's death very much, but seemed, more than all, to feel for him the disappointments and the cloud of depression which had made an old man of him and shortened his life. That there should be little to inherit seemed to him a small matter. Isabel thought of her own father and of his harsh judgment of this other man who, after all, had been able to gain and keep the love of his children. She shook her head when Mrs.

Gifford asked if she would not, this time, try to see her father.

"Dick's father was mine too," she said, "and Father hated him." A moment after, she added; "I wrote to Father once—but he never answered."

In spite of their sorrow, it was a pleasure to see Cassie again and to realize how happy her marriage was. They all spent some time together in the old Lansing house, and then, Dick's leave being up and the necessary business transacted, as far as was possible for the time, they bade each other good-bye, and Dick and Isabel started westward.

Sadness hung over them through all the tiresome journey on the railway, but when they alighted at their last station and met the familiar ambulance and mules with the friendly soldier escort, and set out on the long, rough drive across a country which was none too safe, their hearts lightened, and neither monotony of desert nor danger of pass seemed discouraging to them. They were going to their own life again.

They were going, moreover, with another promotion to cheer them. Owing to one or two sudden deaths and resignations among the older officers of the regiment everybody went up several files and Dick became a captain before he could reasonably have expected it. It seemed to him that he could ask nothing better of life than to be captain of B Troop.

LVI

FROM the burning sands of Arizona to the wind-swept snows of the great northwest country; from the desert dryness to the great river lying frozen below the bluff; from the adobe house, with its thick walls, to the slightly built shack of unseasoned lumber; from a hundred and twenty degrees above zero to forty degrees below. Also, from tinned meats and butter melting in glass jars to a larder hung full of game. All this, with a preparation no longer than the time required to pack boxes and barrels and set out on the journey.

Isabel had thought that she could never find fault with any degree of cold, but when she shivered beside her fire of green wood, or took her short walk in front of the quarters in a cañon shoveled out through snowdrifts so high that she could not see over them, and had to hurry back to the house lest nose and cheeks should be frozen, she almost wished for Arizona again. Almost, but not quite.

"I will not say I like to be frozen because I hate to be burned," she declared. "I feel at liberty to dislike discomfort in any form."

But it was pleasant to get to a large post again, with Colonel Raynor in command; and the old band, which they had left behind when they went to Arizona, was good to hear. There were lively hops every Saturday night; and there was much music between times.

Troop C had come with the rest, and of course that meant the Hazeltons. Isabel was glad for Dick, and touched by his happiness at having Frank with him again. She was even a little pleased to see Lily, so insistent is an old tie. Moreover, they met on a new footing. Lily was a much smaller element in her life than she had been at the first post, and could not, she felt, any

longer come between her and other people. And she was welcome to dance with Dick as often as she chose. Nobody in the world could now disturb Isabel where he was concerned.

She had now devised her own share in the amusement of the hop nights. While the others were still dancing she put away her book and got ready for them. They were glad enough to come through the freezing air for her good little supper. And if, sometimes, the hours dragged before she heard the sound of their hilarious voices as they came along the snow-packed walk; and if she still longed for the forbidden pleasure, the sting of the deprivation was drawn by a remark which her husband happened to make in her hearing. Someone had repeated the banal old saying about women's standard of honor; that it was different from men's; that they did not live up to their engagements.

"Not the woman I know best," Dick had said quickly. "My wife doesn't know how to break a promise, even when she made it before she knew what it meant."

How worth while it had been after all!

And then, surprisingly, the eight months' winter was over. At last, the spring actually came. Little by little, the snow melted; with many delays, many snow squalls, many white patches in shady places—patches which seemed as if they would never be all gone. But even those discouraging bits gradually receded at the edges and grew almost imperceptibly smaller until they vanished. The cottonwood trees, planted in rows in front of the quarters because they grew so quickly, put out their leaves and shaded the little frame houses which were at last visible down to their foundations—or lack of them. One could walk on the board walk now; and along the river bank were pleasant stretches where the cottonwoods grew tall and broad and made a play of light and shade, refreshing after the snow glare; while here and there one found a blue hepatica peeping from its fuzzy gray calix.

Isabel resumed her rides with elation. Pat had ac-

accompanied her in all her changes of station, but she had not been able to ride during the long winter, and now it was delightful to find herself on his back again. She found, however, that the rides must be restricted. Along with the other wild animals, the Indians had crept out from their winter shelters, and they were not all friendly. Every now and then stories were brought in of grisly deeds, and although Dick had kept it from her as far as he could, there were beginning to be rumors of a summer campaign. She kept her service revolver with her riding clothes and took it when she went out, almost as mechanically as she put on her boots.

Frank Hazelton sometimes joined them on their rides, but Lily did not often go. She was discontented because she could not have such a horse as she wished.

"It's just as well," Dick said one time when he and Isabel were out by themselves. "She's hard on a horse. I'm sorry for both back and mouth of any horse she rides." The only criticism he was ever known to make of Lily was of her riding.

Isabel smiled, but not aloud did she venture on the comment that, as between Lily and a horse, he put the horse first. What she did say was: "If you had found out that I couldn't learn to manage a horse considerably would you have loved me still?"

"That's nonsense," he replied. "Might as well ask whether I'd have loved you if you hadn't been yourself."

"But you couldn't know—about me and a horse."

"Lots of things I couldn't know—nor you either—but somehow we knew without knowing. It's a sort of recognition that has nothing to do with knowledge."

Isabel rode on slowly. For a moment she said nothing. Then she turned to him a face touched with emotion. "I love you very much when you talk like that, Dick. And I like to think of that spiritual side of love. How can people——"

"How can people—what?"

"How can they think it comes more than once? Oh—love affairs of a sort—yes. I don't mean that. But

marriage. How can that come twice? And how can they marry without it? Or marry twice anyway?"

"Well, dear, let's hope we never have a chance."

"Live till we're both a hundred and then die together." She spoke lightly, but a shiver passed through her.

"Let's have a gallop!"

LVII

"I WONDER what's the matter with Frank," said Dick. "He looks haggard and sallow, and altogether off. And he's nervous." Which was as near as Dick ever got to admitting that Frank was sometimes irritable.

Isabel looked contemplatively across the breakfast table. "One of the many nice things about you, Dick," she said, "is that you are so tremendously good-looking. And the kind of good-looking that a soldier ought to be."

"Thanks. I'm glad I make up properly for the part." He made a grinning face at her as he took another muffin. "It's obvious that I should say something nice to you in return, but I won't. You're spoiled. The Colonel was all struck of a heap with you last night."

"Well, every woman ought to be spoiled. Our day is short. I'll be saying—My dears, I *used* to look so-and-so, while you will still be as handsome as ever."

"And why not you?"

"Because complexion doesn't matter to a man. Lines don't hurt his face a bit and he isn't dependent on coloring. When a woman gets wrinkles and loses her color and has to depend on features and expression—well, about that time she's a has-been. I think I may be tempted to make up, like—" She paused and looked at him with a gleam in her eye.

"Oh, don't say it! What's the use?"

She laughed outright. "I won't. I don't need to. I'll only say—like some women who are young enough to know better. But I do hope Frank will be all right soon."

Dick reflected, with knitted brow. "I wonder if it's money. I hope he gets his captaincy soon. You know he has nothing but his pay, and think how much more

we spend—and yet we think we are living simply. I wish—oh, hang it! Frank oughtn't to be proud with me, but he would be."

If Frank was proud, his wife wasn't. She would have taken help wherever she could get it. For she was finding herself hard pressed in these days. Even the slight increase of pay which came with the first promotion didn't seem to help very much. For there are so many things which one can't do without. Lily lapped up luxuries as a cat laps cream. To be sure, she was deft with her needle, but nice materials are always expensive. And she liked pretty furnishings for her dinner table and good things to eat on it; and in her own room all sorts of toilet appliances. Although her dressing table might be made of a packing box draped with muslin, she liked an array of costly things on it; and in the cupboard the last word in lotions and cosmetics. The delicate fair skin which had suffered from the hot, dry climate of the southwest must be delicately restored by art; the flaxen hair must be treated with the utmost care and science. In short, Lily worshiped her body and nothing was too good for it. And, of course, Frank had to have his uniform up to date and in good order. About that there was no choice. She anathematized every order prescribing changes and additions in the matter of uniform, and longed with all her soul for the next promotion. She did not hesitate to write home and ask that birthday and Christmas presents should be in money; neither did she scruple to ask for additional gifts, although she knew—no one better than she—the limits of her father's income. For such a gift she was now waiting with an impatience which she could hardly control. She had an account at a big New York store and had been unable to pay the last month's bill, which was headed by the dread words, "Account rendered"; and she had a lively recollection of the only time when Frank had been so angry with her that she really could not manage him. Indeed, "angry" was a mild term for his fury of rage and mortification when he told her that a bill of hers had been sent to

the War Department, and the amount kept out of his pay. It was a hideous experience and one which she could not repeat. But what was to be done?

Just at this crisis it was irritating to be present when a large box arrived from the east for Isabel; a dress-maker's box, of all arrivals the most interesting. Isabel didn't want to unpack it with Lily looking on, seeing in advance the envy in her eyes, no matter what might be the criticism on her tongue. She put the box aside, but Lily lingered. Irritating or not, she wanted to see what Isabel had got.

"Aren't you going to open it?" she asked.

"Oh, after a while."

"But I want to see your things. That's what I'm waiting for. I dare say some of the women will try to copy them, but you needn't be afraid of *me*."

"I never thought of such a thing," said Isabel, flushing.

She cut the string and took the outer wrapping paper off; then raised the cover. "I hardly know what Miss Timmons has sent," she said, as she pulled a gown from the enveloping tissue paper. "Oh!"

The exclamation was involuntary and expressed sheer pleasure.

"It is lovely," said Lily, putting out an appraising finger to feel of the material. "But a little fade-away, don't you think? There won't be much color in it when you get into a roomful of real pinks and blues."

"I don't care," said Isabel. "I like it."

The dress was of pale pink silk of softest sheen, half covered with tulle of the same tint. People wore overskirts in those days, and bouffant draperies, but artistic fingers had made an ugly fashion look graceful. She shook out the soft folds and held it off at arm's length. Then she happened to glance at Lily and her face changed. She laid the dress over the back of a chair.

"Aren't you going to try it on?" asked Lily.

"Not now," she said carelessly. "It's too much trouble." She did wish Lily would go.

"You really ought to see it on another person to get the effect. I could put it on to show you. We are not so different, even if you are taller."

"Oh, it doesn't matter about my seeing it now," said Isabel hastily. "I'll just take it into the other room, in case any of the men come in."

She picked it up and opened the door of her bedroom, but Lily was behind her, already unhooking her own gown. "Yes, it's better to come in here," she said calmly.

She had her gown off in an instant, while Isabel stood helplessly looking at her. Then she seized the pink gown and put it over her head.

"Just lace it up for me," she said. "You can skip some of the eyelets, you know."

Inwardly rebellious, Isabel obeyed her. She felt as if she would like to slap the white shoulders which were turned toward her.

"It just suits me," said Lily complacently. "You see, all my tints are delicate enough to go with this faint shade of pink." She regarded herself eagerly in the mirror. "You need more decided colors. Such a shame that Timmons doesn't know enough to see that." She turned herself about, swishing the train behind her and stepping on the front as she did so.

Isabel watched her in silence.

"Oh, you dear thing!" cried Lily, looking at her with malice in her shallow blue eyes. "You needn't grudge me its becomingness—here in your bedroom." She turned herself this way and that, before the mirror. "You've got the only cheval glass in the post," she added.

"It certainly is becoming," said Isabel, trying to hide her vexation. For the moment, her pleasure in the new gown was spoiled and she half felt like telling Lily to take it. But one hardly cared to play into her hand. She would have accepted it instantly.

Lily had taken up the hand-glass and was now surveying her back. "Well," she said finally, with a long sigh,

"I must get into my old clothes now and go home. Unlace me, please."

Isabel took the gown off from her and threw it carelessly on the bed. When Dick came in he saw it there. He lifted the edge of the skirt and looked at it. "Pretty nice. You'll be good enough to eat in that. But there's a spot." He pointed to a smudge near the bottom.

"Lily wanted to try it on," said Isabel, "and stepped on it."

"What queer things women are," he commented, "trying on each other's clothes."

"Could you imagine *me* doing such a thing?" cried Isabel indignantly. "I hated her to try it on, but she insisted. And oh, Dick, she was so envious."

"Oh, well—any of us might be envious, you know, if we had to do without things." He started out of the room, whistling, but turned at the door. "Going to wear it to the hop to-night?"

"No, indeed. I'm not going. And if I were, I shouldn't get myself up in a new frock when you're Officer of the Day and have to go in fatigue uniform. It's to do you credit at Colonel Raynor's dinner next week."

But Lily was going to the hop, and Isabel's new gown and her own entrancing appearance in it had hardened a resolution which had been slowly forming in her mind. Once let her get that bill paid and she could start a fresh account. She surely did need a new evening dress—and why should Isabel have everything? She dressed herself in the best of her old ones that evening, a soft, clinging white gown; and touched cheeks, lips and eyebrows with deft, artistic fingers. When she had finished she was a trifle paler than usual, with slight shadows under her eyes. "I'm rather a fright when I look like this," she sighed, "but it's best—and it's worth it!" She composed her features into an expression of gentle melancholy—then grimaced at herself in the glass.

Her husband was waiting for her in the next room. "Aren't you well?" he asked, looking at her sharply. "You don't look quite yourself."

She gave an ill-natured little laugh. "Perfectly well. I suppose I look a bit *passée* in my old clothes."

He sighed with vexation. "Your clothes always look all right."

"But they're not!" she retorted sharply.

They walked to the dancing hall in silence, but when they entered the room Lily's face wore its most alluring smile. As a matter of course, Dick came presently to ask her to dance. To his surprise she proposed that they should sit it out, and immediately conducted him to the only retired corner which the big bare place afforded. He went somewhat discontentedly, for although he loved to dance with Lily he cared little, if he would have confessed it, for her conversation. She seated herself, giving her drapery a dexterous twist, to clear the way to a chair close beside her.

"I'm low in my mind to-night," she said, "and for about the first time in my life, I don't feel like dancing."

"Oh, if you're low in your mind," said Dick, rising with alacrity, "come on and dance. It's a great deal better for you than talking."

But Lily shook her head sadly. She sighed and looked down, then raised her eyes appealingly. "Do sit down," she said. "Perhaps in a few minutes I'll dance."

He sat down. There seemed nothing else to do. But he found nothing to say. Lily was again looking at the floor and did not seem to be thinking about him. Presently, however, she raised her head, as if she had taken a great resolution.

"I wonder," she said, hesitatingly, "if I dare tell you how desperately worried I am."

"It would do you more good to forget your worries and have a good time," parried the unwilling confidant.

"But I'm so worried about Frank," she persisted. His reluctance to listen was so evident that she gave up the idea of trusting to her own allurements and threw herself on the claims of his friendship for her husband. The thought crossed her mind that she needn't have made a

fright of herself, after all. The stupid man didn't know how she looked.

At the mention of her husband Dick turned to her with a changed manner. "What's the matter with Frank?" he asked quickly.

"Do you think he's looking well?"

"No, I don't. I've been thinking about it. Isn't he well?"

"He's not ill," said Lily slowly, "but oh, he is so worried all the time. And now—now it's going to be worse." She hoped that the pathetic tremor in her voice was not lost on Dick, but could not feel sure. He was so dull. "It's all my fault," she continued. "I meant so well and have been so foolish—and now I'm frantic about him. He is going to be beside himself when he knows."

"Knows what?" Dick settled back in his chair. "Perhaps you'd better begin at the beginning and tell me. If I can do anything——"

"Oh, you're so good. You're always so good!"

Genuine tears of relief were in her eyes as she raised them to his. She did not let them fall, however. Quite surely Dick would not have liked that. Instead, she waited for a moment and visibly conquered them. "Now I'm not going to be silly," she said, smiling deprecatingly. "But it is hard to confess one's mistakes. I feel half like running away. But then—there's no one but you I can speak to—Frank's friend—and mine." She stopped, with an air of reluctance.

Dick had seen the tears and was thankful to her for suppressing them. She really looked very pretty, in spite of her pallor—and she was Frank's wife. His manner became far more sympathetic.

"Go on and tell me," he said encouragingly.

She did not fail to appreciate the kindness of his voice. "I've made a debt," she murmured. Her shamefacedness was not all put on. "And Frank doesn't know."

"If it's only money it can be mended."

"Of course that seems only a small trouble to you,"

she said reproachfully. "It's pretty dreadful for us. And oh, I know how wrong it was, but I didn't realize how large it was getting. And now they're dunning me to pay the bill and there won't be anything to pay it with, even when I do tell Frank—and he's already worried with just ordinary expenses. You know how punctilious he is." She raised her eyes to his. "I'm almost out of my mind about it!" she exclaimed passionately. "Sometimes I'm afraid Frank will kill himself when he knows. He said once that he would rather shoot himself—" She stopped suddenly. "I've sent home," she added, in a subdued voice, "but they can't help me."

"Don't worry about it any more," said Dick. "Surely Frank will accept a loan from me." But he spoke with an assurance that he did not feel.

"He would never take it in the world," said Lily quickly. Must she dot all her i's before he would understand? "And he would never forgive me if he knew that I had told you anything. And I'd have to tell him about this debt, and—oh, don't you see what a horrid mess it would be? No, it's awfully good of you, Dick—just as good as it can be—but you'd better just forget that I have said anything at all. I don't know why I did—but it seemed as if I simply had to tell someone. And perhaps—" her voice trembled a little—"perhaps I might do something to earn money. Maybe Isabel would let me do some sewing for her—and pay me. I am skilful, you know."

"Oh, stop it, Lily! What are friends good for if they can't help each other out? But not that way. Don't be absurd."

Come now, thought Lily, this was better. She cast down her eyes, lest their exultation betray her.

"Now, I'll tell you what," Dick went on, "you and Isabel must get together. Frank and I will be entirely out of it. You tell Isabel just how much you need and I'll see that she has it to give to you. I'll talk to her first, of course. And then we'll all be happy."

How utterly exasperating he was, in his stupidity!

Lily raised pained eyes to his face. "You dear fellow," she said. "You are too sweet and generous for words, but I could never, never do that. You know Isabel don't like me as much as I like her—she never has, even when we were small children. She wouldn't judge me as kindly as you do. Of course she would have a right to judge me harshly, for I've been so foolish and such a bad manager—though I've truly had my lesson now. But no, Dick, I don't see how I could possibly tell Isabel about my failures and follies—and as to taking money from her—even if it really comes from you—oh, I can sacrifice my pride a good deal, for Frank's sake, but not that! Thank you just the same, dear Dick. I do appreciate it."

Their corner was quite retired. She laid her fingers on his hand, with a timid, but clinging touch, and the eyes which were upturned to his veiled their shallow hardness under the film of tears which came so obediently to her need of them. Dick was sorry and embarrassed, but his instinct still warned him to keep out of a personal money transaction with his friend's wife.

"You're mistaken about Isabel," he said. "Just try her. She'll be only too glad to help."

"But you *know* she would be critical of me in her heart. I'm afraid I'm not large and fine enough to accept that sort of help from anyone who don't feel very, very kindly toward me—as I'm sure you do. You can't really assure me that my instinct about Isabel's feeling toward me is at fault."

Dick, nothing if not honest, hesitated just for an instant under her scrutiny. When he was about to speak she put out her hand to stop him.

"No, no," she said, "you needn't say a word. And thank you just the same. There's nothing left but to tell Frank and take the consequences. Poor Frank! If I could only spare him! I don't matter."

Dick was desperately uncomfortable. It seemed that there was no way to get around it. "Look here!" he said brusquely. "Tell me just how much you need.

"We'll keep it between ourselves, since you prefer it that way."

Lily thought quickly and decided to add fifty dollars to the debt. The larger the amount, the more convincingly it would show that Frank could not possibly pay it. Besides, Dick owed her something for being so hard to manage, with his talk about Isabel.

She drooped her head and seemed to hesitate. "It's such a lot," she murmured.

"Oh, come, don't be afraid."

There was not in his tone the tender sympathy that she needed. She felt wounded; and added another fifty. "It's two hundred and fifty dollars," she said in so low a tone that he had to bend over her to hear the words.

He straightened up with a laugh. "All this misery for that?" he said.

"It's more than a month's pay," she said in an injured tone, and wished she had asked for a little more. "We are always behind, without that. Of course it don't seem much to people like you and Isabel, but it is tragedy for us."

His face grew sober. "Yes," he said, "it would be hard on Frank. I beg your pardon for laughing, Lily, but I had really been afraid perhaps I wouldn't have enough on hand. Now it's all right, and everything will be happy again."

"Oh, you are so good—so good!" she cried softly. "You know I'd never, never take it, but for Frank and to save him unhappiness. For myself, I'd rather get down on my knees and scrub."

"Well, now, it's all settled. I'll give you my cheque to-morrow." He rose as he spoke. "I expect you are keeping some partner out of his dance."

"One moment." She rose too, and laid her hand on his arm. "I'm afraid the cheque—have you got it in cash?"

He flushed with vexation. How he hated the affair! But she was right about the cheque. There might be embarrassments. He wondered whether she wouldn't,

after all, have taken the money from Isabel if he had insisted.

"Yes, I drew out some money a day or two ago," he said, a little stiffly. "I have enough. I'll put it in an envelope and give it to you to-morrow."

"You'll hate me—I give you so much trouble. But I'll thank you as long as I live, Dick. If you come right after breakfast, on your way to guard mounting, I'll look out and go to the door myself."

"Very well," said Dick, leading the way back to the ballroom.

Lily reflected that although he had said they would keep it to themselves, she had not got him to promise definitely that he would not tell Isabel. One couldn't think of everything—and he hurried her so at the end. But after all, he would hardly tell. It wouldn't be any too comfortable for him to own up to his wife. It was the kind of thing a man would keep to himself.

But then, Lily did not quite understand the relation between Dick and his wife.

LVIII

DICK had always found it more comfortable to take a superficial view of his friend's wife. Instinctively, he didn't want to understand her thoroughly. Now, compelled to a better comprehension, he stigmatized her as a little cat, and himself as a simpleton. Not that he was unwilling to help her out of her scrape. Indeed, for Frank's sake, it was necessary to help her out; but it ought to have been done through Isabel. Between the two women, all could have been arranged; whereas, if Frank should ever find out what he was doing, good-bye to their friendship. The perspiration started out on his brow as he thought about it. He wanted to go straight home and tell Isabel all about it. A moment's reflection convinced him that Lily would not have refused to take the packet of money from her, in spite of her fine words. How she had wound him around her finger!

But meantime, he was engaged to dance with his Major's wife and with his Colonel's niece. Impossible to cut the rest of the hop and go home. The dancing was to stop at eleven, but afterward there was to be a larger supper party than usual at his quarters. He and Isabel were trying to make the visit of the Colonel's niece pleasant. And he couldn't slip off earlier because Miss Raynor had put him down for two dances, one of them being the very last; and as the Colonel could not come to supper that night, he was to act as her escort and take her home again afterward, and then, being Officer of the Day, he would still have to make a round of the big post.

He sighed with vexation, resolved to expedite the supper so far as he might and get back home before Isabel could go to sleep. He was almost sure they would de-

cide to have her hand Lily the money. Then with an effort, he threw the affair aside and did his duty by the female relatives of his superior officers. So well did he do it that the Major's wife, when she was brushing her hair that night, confided to her husband that she was rather sorry for Mrs. Malden.

"Really," she said, "she makes a great mistake to keep that tiresome old promise about dancing. She ought to go with her husband and keep her eye on him."

And the Colonel's niece said to her uncle at breakfast the next morning that she should think Mr. Malden's pretty wife would be jealous of him; he flirted around so. Whereupon Colonel Raynor snubbed her properly and warned her not to start garrison gossip.

"And you needn't worry about Mrs. Malden," he added. "Her young man knows how well off he is. He's only being polite."

The supper was a lively one; so lively that even Frank's careworn countenance relaxed. Lily was in high feather, relieved of all her anxieties, and as for the Colonel's niece, there could be no doubt that she was enjoying army life. But Isabel wondered why Dick was in such a hurry to get the supper served. He did contrive to say to her aside, that he wanted a chance to talk to her, but somebody claimed her attention just then and she failed to get an impression that it was of importance. No one else was in a hurry. It seemed as if they had never stayed so late before. The Colonel's niece laughed incessantly and was evidently loth to have the entertainment end. When at last the good-byes were said, her host made as short work as possible of the walk home with her, covering up his impatience by an extra *empressement* of manner.

He was hurrying back to his quarters when Major Horne hailed him from his verandah.

"Come up, won't you," said he. "It's late, but you won't be going to bed, as you have your round to make, and I've been wanting a chance to talk with you."

What was the junior officer to do? Dick went up the

steps, accepted a cigar, and was told news which drove Lily and her affairs clean out of his head.

He stayed with Major Horne nearly an hour, and Isabel, tired of waiting for him, at last went to bed and to sleep. Dick did remember Lily when he got home, and was disappointed, but he would not for anything have waked his wife. Let her sleep peacefully, while she could! There would be time enough to talk in the morning. He put out the lamp which had been left burning for him and started out for his starlight walk around the post.

It was after two o'clock when he got back from his tour and went to bed on a sofa downstairs which had been arranged by his order, so that he need not awaken Isabel when he went out again. He was wide awake at first, and not particularly tired, but in the end slept heavily. He was roused by the din of an alarm clock set on a china plate beside him; a device which could be relied on. He sat up with a start, rolled off his sofa and hustling on his clothes, rushed out for reveille roll-call.

On his way back, looking forward to his bath and proper toilet, to be followed by breakfast with his wife, he remembered Lily and his promise to take her the money. Well, he could tell Isabel about it at breakfast.

But on his return he found no Isabel, only a note saying that Mrs. Betts's baby was very ill and she had gone over to see what she could do to help.

Dick realized afterward that the matter might have waited a few hours, but he had an incurable habit of keeping his engagements promptly. Moreover, the news of the night before, followed by a few hours' sleep, had, for the moment, blunted his perceptions. This was just a disagreeable thing that he must get off his mind before he could go on to anything else. He swallowed the last of his coffee and went to his desk. Unlocking a drawer, he pulled out the money, counted it and folded the notes as flat as he could. But they were quite new and a good many small ones, so they made a thick

package, which he thrust into an envelope. Hastily buckling on his sword and snatching his cap and gloves, he strode over to the Hazeltons' quarters. Lily was at the door as he ran up the steps.

"Good-morning," he said, in his usual tone. Dick was not used to concealments and precautions.

Lily put her finger to her lips and gave him a warning look, as she held out her hand. Her fingers closed quickly and graspingly on the envelope. "Oh, *thank you*," she said, just above her breath.

The next instant Frank's head appeared behind hers in the doorway. "Come in," he invited.

"I haven't an instant," replied Dick, hurriedly, trying not to look as embarrassed as he felt.

How stupid of him, thought Lily. Why couldn't he come in? Now she would have to invent. "I'm sorry you're in such a hurry," she said. "Tell Isabel, yes, I'll be delighted to come over."

She wished that Dick had made the money into a smaller package. As it was impossible to conceal it, she handled it as if it were of no account. Frank's appearance on the scene was quite contrary to her expectation. He was supposed to be taking his morning ride, but, as ill luck would have it, he had returned earlier than he ordinarily did.

As Dick dashed down the steps, Frank said idly: "That was the shortest message ever given. It seemed to consist in saying good-morning."

"Oh," said Lily, "I was to tell him when he came, whether I could go over there this morning to help Isabel with some sewing. I must be off right away."

She said it quite smoothly and easily, but, in her haste and her desire to get away she placed the imaginary engagement too soon. Although Frank was not aware of any reason for suspicion he was, as it were, automatically suspicious.

"He hasn't gone home," he said. "You'll have to deliver your message yourself. I don't see why he came."

"That's a fact. Why—how stupid of us!" The exclamation was quite sincere.

Frank had laid an arm across her shoulder and kept her from flight. She dropped the hand containing the precious packet until it hung down between them. In that way it was safe from view. Unfortunately, it was stiff at the corners.

"What's that you're sticking into me?" asked Frank. He withdrew his arm, and, reaching down, pulled up her hand.

"It's just a pattern Isabel sent me," she replied easily.

"The stiffest pattern I ever felt," said Frank, who had vast experience with the envelopes full of mysterious scraps of tissue paper. He pinched the envelope and bent it back and forth, Lily still holding tightly to it. Suddenly his face changed and he felt it more carefully. She tried to pull it away, but in vain.

"Give it to me," he said. "I'd like to look at your pattern."

"Oh, nonsense, Frank!" She clung to it with cold fingers.

He pulled them away, quite gently, but with a strength which she could not resist. Then he tore the envelope open.

"There seems to be a good deal of it," he said dryly. He flattened the package, and lifting the end of each note, counted them.

"Now please explain," he said. "Two hundred and fifty dollars is a sum which is not quite legitimate in this house."

Lily was trembling and the tears which came to her eyes were genuine. She struggled to make her voice even.

"Isabel insisted," she said. "She—I couldn't help telling her some of my troubles and she said we had been friends all our lives—long before I ever heard of you—and I must let her treat me like a sister. She has plenty of money."

Frank's face, which had been white, flushed deeply.

"She may have plenty of money," he said, "but it is not for us to take it." He refolded the notes and put them into the envelope again.

"Very well, give it to me and I will take it back," said Lily meekly. "I said you wouldn't like it."

"And so you were not going to tell me. It was a pattern. No, Lily, I can't trust you about money. We will take it back together." He put the package into his pocket and picked up his cap. "Come!" he said.

Lily burst into tears. She did not try to conceal her face, which was quite distorted and ugly. "You haven't any right!" she exclaimed, between her sobs.

"I have every right. Come!"

"I—I can't!" she gasped. She threw herself back on a sofa, with an air of fainting. "I think I'm going to die," she murmured.

"You're not fainting and you're not going to die," said Frank, immovably. "Get up and come with me."

Lily had never heard him speak in that tone. For the second time in her life, she was afraid of him. She got up, wiped her eyes, passed her fingers over her hair and went through the door in front of him.

Isabel, who had just got home, met them at the door. A glance at their faces checked the cheerfulness of her greeting. "Have you had bad news?" she exclaimed in alarm.

Lily would have flown to her to whisper a hurried appeal, but her husband's hand was on her arm, and at her first movement, he gripped it tightly.

"We have come to give you this," he said, taking the package from his pocket and extending it to her, "and to say that while Lily appreciates your generosity, she cannot accept it."

In her surprise, Isabel backed away from his outstretched hand. "I don't know what you mean," she said.

Frank resumed with an air of controlling his temper. "When you sent this——"

"But I didn't!" interjected Isabel, in her bewilderment.

Frank stopped short. His face became livid. There was a moment of dead silence. He still gripped Lily's arm so that she could not move.

"Of course you sent it," said Lily, desperately. "You don't understand. It's what you told me——"

"Keep quiet!" said her husband. His fingers were hurting her badly.

Isabel looked from one to the other, looked at the envelope which Frank was still holding out to her, opened her lips to speak, and closed them again. What it was all about she could not imagine, but it seemed to her an occasion when whatever she said was likely to be disastrous.

Frank stood with compressed lips, trying to control himself. "Then you have been deceived, too," he said at last, between set teeth. Leaving the package on the table, he added: "This is for Captain Malden, with my compliments." Turning on his heel, he was about to leave the room, when his eyes fell on his wife. She was gazing at the precious package. "Come with me!" he said imperatively, and, cowed, she followed him.

Isabel, bewildered, walked to the table and picked up the mysterious envelope. Turning back the flap, she saw its contents. She dropped it quickly, with an exclamation of astonishment, then stood quite still, her brows puckered in thought.

It did not take long for her to guess pretty accurately what had happened. "Poor Dick!" she said to herself. "What was he to do in the hands of the little white cat? And, of course, he made a botch of it."

She spent the morning in an agony of anxiety lest the two men should meet before she could get at Dick, but when he came in to luncheon it was evident that nothing had happened. He seemed a trifle preoccupied, but not at all upset. He was upset, however, when she told her tale.

"But oh, you foolish person," she exclaimed at the

end, "why didn't you tell me and let me manage it, if it had to be managed?"

"I wish to God I had!" said Dick, desperately. "But I couldn't get at you."

He told her all about it. "I was dying to tell you," he ended, "but you see how everything got in my way. First last night and then this morning. And now—you see what Frank thinks? It's too bad to put into words."

"I see."

He dropped into a chair, his elbows on the table, his head supported on his hands. "It's perfectly hopeless! He wants to kill me and I can't blame him."

"It shan't be hopeless!" Isabel, as always, rose to conquer defeat. "There *must* be some way out of it. Of course, he will never believe in Lily again, but I don't think he has believed in her very much for some time. But he must believe in you again, Dick. He simply must be made to!"

But Dick only shook his head miserably. "He's seeing red just now." She was leaning over him and he turned and put his arm around her. "You are the one satisfactory person in the world," he said. "You always understand."

LIX

AFTER Dick had at last been obliged to leave her, Isabel paced the floor, trying to find some way of cutting the tangle. That, for the present, any effort Dick could make would only be likely to bring about a still worse situation, she had to admit. Lily, of course, was worse than useless. She herself was the only person who might possibly do anything. If only she could get a chance! To accomplish anything she must see Frank alone and without danger of interruption; and it might take a long time to bring him to reason. How to get that opportunity?

In one of her turns through the room she stopped by the window and stood looking out, scarcely seeing anything at first. Then she suddenly started up to an alert attention. Frank rode past, and, as her eyes followed him, she saw that he was going toward the river road.

"Poor fellow," she said to herself. "He has gone out to try to get away from everyone—and I will go after him!"

She flew to the kitchen door and called for Kelly, the striker. She had seen him go around the corner of the house only a few minutes before. She ordered her horse. "Just as quickly as you can, Kelly," she enjoined, giving thanks that she had a better horse than Frank. Surely she could overtake him.

She put on her habit and was impatiently waiting when Kelly brought Pat up. He was mounted to accompany her.

"But I don't want you," she said. "I am going alone."

Kelly looked doubtful. "The Captain would not like me to leave you go alone." His manner was respectful, but firm.

"But I'm not really going alone," she replied, impatiently, as he put her in the saddle. "I'm only starting alone. And I'm late and must hurry." She gathered up the reins as she spoke. "It's all right," she said, over her shoulder, and was off at a smart gallop.

Kelly stood looking after her dubiously. "But 'tis queer," he muttered, shaking his head. "When 'tis a gentleman, he comes to get the lady. If 'tis two wimmin I should be following." He mounted and rode on for some distance, and, by keeping his horse to its best speed, was able to keep his captain's wife in sight until she had overtaken and joined Lieutenant Hazelton. Then he turned and went back, wondering at the queer-ness of it all, but thanking his stars that he had been seen riding behind Mrs. Malden by anyone who chose to look. No one knew better than Kelly the comments that might be made.

It had not been difficult for Isabel to overtake Frank, who was sitting in his saddle as though he did not know where he was or what he was doing, the horse going at the gait which suited it. He looked up in surprise as she reined in beside him, and the first involuntary expression on his face was of intense irritation.

She was the first to speak. "You are not glad to see me," she said. "I was afraid you wouldn't be, but I had to talk to you, and this seemed the easiest way."

He looked at her gloomily. "I don't see what good it can do."

She turned to him a flushed and eager face. "Oh, yes, it can do good. It *must* do good. You see, I understand all about it, and you don't."

"You and I are pretty much in the same boat," he said morosely, "only you seem to be fooled, and I am not."

"Now see here, Frank," she said quietly. "Do I strike you as a person who is likely to be fooled?"

"Not in most things," he admitted, "unless you want to be. I don't blame you for wanting to keep your eyes shut—but I can't do it myself."

"Doesn't it mean anything to you that you have known Dick all these years? Haven't you always known what kind of a man he was?"

"Don't speak of him!" said Frank, violently. "There are some things I can't stand."

They went on for a few moments in silence, their horses walking side by side. Then Isabel said: "You've no quarrel with me, have you?"

"No—but——"

"But you want me to let you alone. Well, instead of that, I am going to ask you to do me a favor. Will you?"

"If I can." It was a grudging consent.

"Surely you can. I want you to listen to me while I tell you exactly what happened."

He began an impatient exclamation.

"No," she interrupted, "you've really got to hear me."

He listened in dogged silence, then, while she told him all that had happened exactly as Dick had told it to her; and she had got a pretty full account of the affair. "I am not sparing Lily," she concluded, "because I can't. I've undertaken to tell you a perfectly true story."

"Do you suppose you have got at the true story?" he asked with a sneer.

"Yes, I do," she flashed back at him. "And so do you. You know perfectly well, Frank, that even if Dick didn't want to tell me the truth, I should either get it out of him, or know that he was lying. Dick is ever and ever so much better than I am, but in some things he is no match for me—and you know it. And besides, you know that he has never been anything but straight and clean and true. You know him—and you know Lily. Or perhaps you don't know Lily. I have known her all my life. She likes to flirt in a harmless way, she likes her pleasure, but it isn't her pleasure to flirt seriously. She does love to think that people are crazy about her, but that's all. Of course, she has spent too much money and she has deceived you. It rests with you to decide whether you can forgive that. But Dick!

Do you mean to say you can't see how it is about Dick?"

"But even supposing it were all as you say—what right had Dick to give my wife money—money that he knew well enough I wouldn't myself take from him? Do you mean to say that that wasn't an insult?"

"Well, put yourself in his place. Suppose I had found myself in a scrape about money and you had had plenty—and I had been plaintive and pitiful—and scared to death about what would happen to Dick—wouldn't you have helped me?"

"I can't quite see you in the situation," he said dryly.

"But suppose—just suppose me not as myself, but just as your friend's wife—Oh!" she cried, impatiently. "Can't you turn the situation about, as between you and Dick? And wouldn't you have been managed, just as Dick was? He *was* managed, you know. She pretty much asked him for the money. Can't you see how it was? And seeing, can't you forgive him for being a little stupid? I don't deny he was stupid about it, but he is absolutely true—and down in your heart, you know it."

She stopped, feeling that she had said all she could. For what seemed to her an interminable while they rode on in silence. From time to time she glanced at Frank, but he was looking straight between his horse's ears and there was no softening of his set, frowning face. Well, she would give him all the time he needed. She rode on silently, her glance straying unseeingly to the desolate landscape; a sandy waste, broken here and there by the cottonwood trees which half hid the broad reaches of the river, as it rushed past, turbid and violent.

After a while, however, her preoccupation was penetrated by an uneasy suspicion that they were getting farther away from the post than they ought, yet she would not on any account disturb Frank by suggesting that they turn around. So much depended on the outcome of that mental struggle which made him unconscious of everything about him. A few steps more surely would make no difference. She went on, sub-

duing her uneasiness and trying to be patient, although they had already passed a stake on which a bit of red flannel was fastened, a sign that they were in an unfriendly country. Then, suddenly, with a gasp, she leaned over and clutched his arm.

By the side of the road, protruding from a clump of bushes, she saw a booted foot, its toe sticking up with a peculiar effect of rigidity.

"Look!" she whispered, just above her breath.

Frank gave one look and then, grasping her rein, turned her horse about. "Wait here!" he commanded.

She heard him, behind her, go a few paces toward that thing which lay so still behind the bushes, and then he came back to her. One glance at his white, stern face was enough.

"Come!" he said. "You have a better horse and ride lighter, but you must not let yourself get separated from me. Unless something happens. Then go as fast as you can, but remember you have five miles and don't run your horse out at the beginning, unless it's necessary. Watch him—nurse him over the whole distance. If you can't get through—have you your revolver?"

"Yes," she answered. Even in her haste she had not forgotten her promise never to go outside the post without it. And there was not a woman in those western outposts who did not know that she must not be taken alive by Indians.

Frank took out his own revolver, spun the cylinder and slipped a cartridge into the chamber which he kept empty under the hammer. "One more shot might help," he said. He did the same thing for her and then they headed toward the post and put their horses into a gallop.

"Easy," said Frank, as her horse forged ahead. "Remember it's a long way. We want to use all they've got—but not kill them until we're in."

Holding back was the hardest thing that Isabel had ever had to do. To fly fast and straight toward safety was her terror-stricken impulse. For any possible ad-

vantage to herself she could hardly have kept from doing so, but she had an agonizing picture of Frank, left behind and intercepted. The horses knew nothing of danger, but they were headed for the stables and it was time for the evening feed. They pulled at their bits and were continually trying to break from the collected gallop in which they were held.

How far it was, and how slowly they seemed to go! After the first two miles, Frank's horse no longer fought for his head, the reins lay loose on his neck. Frank began to talk to him and to encourage him with a gentle touch of the spurs. In another mile he was using his spurs in earnest. The horse's gait lost all its springiness and became a succession of lumbering bounds, each one requiring a visible effort. Their pace was perceptibly slower.

"Hadn't we better walk a little?" Isabel made herself ask. "He's nearly all in, isn't he?"

"No. He's feeling it, but a horse can go a long while after he's tired. That's what we feed 'em for."

"But isn't he apt to stumble?"

"Oh, no," he lied promptly.

The post came in sight, a mile away, as they rose over a fold in the ground and Frank's horse seemed to pick up fresh strength. She could feel the jumps of her own horse becoming stiffer and more labored, his legs seeming to shake each time he came down.

"Pat's not going to fall, is he?" she asked in a sudden terror which she strove to keep out of her voice. "He seems wobbly."

"No indeed, this fellow has been that way for two miles."

Finally they came up to the gate of the field at the edge of the reservation, where a non-com. was schooling some new recruits. Frank slipped off his horse, opened the gate and they went through. Then the horse stretched his neck out, lowered his head, shivered, dropped slowly down and lay quietly on his side.

"Sergeant!" called Frank, "lend me a horse and look

after this one. Better get your men back to the barracks. I will report I ordered you in."

They came into the post quietly at last and found Dick mounting his horse in front of his quarters.

"You had no business to go off in that way," he said, as he lifted Isabel from her saddle. No waiting this time for her to dismount by herself. Relieved from the anxiety which had suddenly possessed him, he was now disposed to be cross. When she leaned against him limply, he looked at her more closely.

She heard Frank say huskily: "Thank God she's back safe!" What was it that his voice recalled to her, as if from a long distance? In an instant it all came back to her. Dick's arm had tightened around her now, but she pulled herself away and fled into the house. Her only thought now must be to efface herself. This was the moment on which everything hung. At the door she turned and saw the two men clasp hands. Then she made her way blindly to her own room, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

When Dick came in, she flung herself into his arms. "Don't scold me!" she exclaimed hysterically. "I'm glad I did it!"

"Scold you, my dearest!" He held her close and she forgot everything but the comfort of being thus held.

Presently, however, she raised her head and drew his down. "It's all right between you and Frank?" she asked.

"It's all right," he answered. "I don't know how you did it, but I've you to thank for it."

"I don't quite know how I did it, myself." She shivered. "I suppose I got him ready by talking a little common sense to him, but it was that dreadful ride together that really did it. It made the little things seem as little as they really are. Oh, Dick, something awful has happened."

"Darling! You didn't see——?"

"No—just enough to know—I don't know what Frank saw. I wish I needn't imagine it! But oh,

Dick——” she clung to him again——“will some of you have to go out against the Indians?”

“Oh, come! Just let me give you a pick-me-up,” he said cheerfully. But he did not answer her question.

Later, after dinner, he told her the news that Major Horne had given him the night before; that an expedition of considerable size was to be sent out at once to overtake and punish the Indians who, under Bloody Lance, most redoubtable of chiefs, had been particularly bold in their depredations; raiding ranches, capturing wagon trains, killing and capturing women and children.

“Major Horne told me in confidence last night,” he said, “so I didn’t tell you before, but now the order is out.”

She hid her face on his shoulder and he felt her shudder. He held her close, then gave her a little shake. “Come, now,” he said, “what else are we stationed here for?”

“Who are going?” she asked in a muffled voice.

“The Colonel is going—and pretty nearly all of us—about six hundred. Enough are left to guard the post. That, of course. We hope to make a clean job of it this time.”

His voice jarred on her, with its tone of excitement. “You sound pleased!” she exclaimed reproachfully.

“Pleased? Well——” He looked at her ruefully. “Oh, my dear girl, don’t take it like that. You never did before. And haven’t I always come back safe and sound?”

“But I’ve never seen before——”

“I’d have done anything to keep you from seeing—but you can see it has to be stopped.”

She raised her head. “Don’t be ashamed of me, Dick. I’ll behave.”

She did behave. They were to start the next evening at sundown, and, although she got but little sleep that night, she saw to it that nothing disturbed Dick. All the next day, while getting his things ready, she managed to achieve a cheerful every-day manner, almost as if he

were merely setting out on an ordinary camping trip. Just before he left her he said:

"I've been so proud of you all day, dearest." A moment later he added: "Just think what it is for Frank and me to go together now, and what it would have been if you hadn't made things straight."

And after that, it was good-bye.

LX

GOOD-BYES are hard; and the tension of the last two days had been great. As Dick rode away from the post with his face set toward the duty ahead of him, he felt a great lightening of the spirit. Misadventures and perplexities were behind him; the parting, with its grip on the emotions, was over; his friend was reconciled; under him was a good horse, behind him his own troop, and before them lay an adventure—the sort of adventure which might culminate in one tense half-hour. But for such half-hours his whole professional life, from the day he entered West Point, had been merely a preparation.

The dimness and coolness of early evening were refreshing after the heat and glare of the day. He turned in his saddle and looked back at his troop, listened to the confused sound of hoof-beats, the creak of leather and the snatches of talk of the men. He knew them, every one, just what each man was and what he was good for; and take them all in all, they could be depended on. As surely as he knew anything, he knew that wherever he led them, those eighty horsemen would follow. More than that, wherever he might send any of them, they would go, and would deal with the business in a workmanlike way. Discipline they had of the old-fashioned kind which taught them that their officer was a being set apart, whose word might never be questioned. But they had self-reliance too, as befitted trained and seasoned men, who knew their job and knew that they knew it. The horses, too, were all in good shape and, as he cast his eye appraisingly over them, he blessed the dull routine of daily horse exercise which prepared them for the field fit to do their hundred miles in a few hours if need be.

Stretching out in a column, the head of which was lost

in the twilight, were five other troops; behind them two more; all good men and good horses, but B Troop was the best. Of that he was sure.

He fell to thinking of nothing in particular, just noting the shadowy clumps of trees which they passed here and there, the waning light, as night came on, and the waxing brightness of the stars.

When they made camp about midnight he was sleepy and quite ready to turn in, but first he and Frank smoked a pipe together. How good that pipe was, out in the open, they two together, just as they had been in the old days. Their hearts were warm with an affection which neither found nor needed expression in words. Dick's last thought before sleep fell upon him was not of his wife. "Good old Frank," he was saying to himself. "I hope this trip will cheer him up." But Frank did not put any thought into words, only lay on his back for a while and drew deep breaths; then turned over on his side and slept more peacefully than he had done for many a night. Far out in the night the sentries were on guard and from close by came an occasional stamp and whinny from the picket line.

They were off again in the early morning; warily this time, with scouts ahead searching for the trail. It was picked up, but was not fresh. The Indians must have passed along there in considerable force some days before. By degrees it diminished, as the hostile band scattered, going off by twos and threes, where the ground was hard and they could not be traced, until at last it disappeared altogether. Now it must be more or less guesswork, and Indian scouts are more skilful guessers than white men. Flying Man, the chief scout, advised them to go southwest; and, "Southwest we go," agreed Colonel Raynor.

They found the trail again a few miles farther on, and once more advanced carefully, but trotting most of the time. They were not burdened with wagons, but had a pack-train of mules. The trail grew wider, as they went along, but still was not new.

The hot midsummer sun of the north shone fiercely down on them as they pursued their way. It was a desolate country which they traversed, fairly level just here and covered with clumps of sagebrush, with a thin row of trees marking the course of a stream which, running full in the springtime, now showed only a dry, sandy bottom. They got among hills before they came to the end of a long day's march and made camp in a wide valley, divided by the bed of a stream of such size that it still showed shallow pools here and there.

The camp was made with care and no fires were allowed, for although the trail was old, there might still be hostile scouts looking out for them. The horses were picketed in a long hollow and the eight troops bivouacked around them, in readiness to stand to arms at an instant's notice.

At daybreak four scouts were sent forward to inspect the country. They returned, reporting a much smaller but fresh trail about a mile up the valley, cutting into the wide one from the east and then following it along. The tracks showed not more than twenty-five ponies and they must have passed within twenty-four hours, very likely even during the night.

"Looks as if they had cut along to warn the main body of our approach," said Major Horne to Dick. "It oughtn't to be hard to overtake them, for we are always better mounted than the Indians. Though we haven't got better firearms," he added ruefully. "Uncle Sam is very thoughtful about supplying them with the means of fighting us."

To catch this small flying band and stop them before they should have time to warn the main body of Indians, a small and mobile force was better than a large one hampered with baggage. C Troop was detailed, commanded, in the absence of its captain who was on leave, by Lieutenant Hazelton. They were to follow up the fresh trail as rapidly as possible and cut the Indians off from communication with Bloody Lance and his village. Each man was to take two days' rations in his haversack.

"You got in ahead of me," grumbled Dick to his friend.

"My good luck," said Frank.

Dick looked after him as he walked away, alert and cheerful. What a difference it made in him to be up and doing.

Lieutenant Hazelton culled out a dozen men whose horses did not seem perfectly fresh and, with the sixty odd who remained, was soon out of sight around the bend of the low hills, while the main body followed at a slower, though steady pace. By afternoon the route became more difficult. The ground was cut up by ravines crossing their path and in some places the trail was so narrow that two horses could not go abreast. At some distance beyond them the ground rose still more steeply and so high that from the lower crests they could not see beyond; nor could they, as yet, hear anything but the sounds which they themselves made. Well-mounted scouts were sent on ahead to climb the hill and find out, if possible, whether anything was happening on the other side.

Dick, going at an even trot along one of the infrequent stretches of fairly smooth ground, found his thoughts suddenly straying far away from the things which might be expected to engross them. Instead of wondering what might be going on over the brow of the hill, or listening for the sound of shots, he thought of the time when he and Isabel first met on the edge of the Fall Creek gorge. He saw her as she looked then, glancing up at him from under her broad-brimmed hat, smiling and blushing. He saw her in a series of pictures; as she looked when, proudly defiant, she told him in her father's frowning presence that she would marry him; and next, so adorably shy when he gave her his first kiss—how hard it had been to get her used to his kisses! He smiled tenderly as he remembered that. Then the picture of her as she stood, in her bridal whiteness, at the door of the room and paused for an instant before she came to him to join hands before the old clergyman.

And since then! What a comrade she had been! How plucky and gay and loving; never misunderstanding him for a moment, not even when he had been such a fool with Lily just now; even giving him back his friend. He seemed to feel her arms about his neck and her farewell kisses. "Good God!" he exclaimed aloud. "I wonder if the two troops left at the post can handle anything that comes." . . .

His mind suddenly came back to the present situation. Coming faintly over the hill ahead was a rat-a-tat which sounded as though somebody was clapping shingles together. Four small black figures appeared over the crest in front and, as they rapidly drew closer, he could make out the scouts, rushing their horses down the declivity toward the column as fast as they could gallop. Colonel Raynor and the adjutant were riding by the troop just ahead of B Troop, so Dick heard the report:

"Down in the valley the other side of this first hill Lieutenant Hazelton and his men are in it—five or six hundred Indians all around them, front and rear and flanks. The valley's swarming with them. Hazelton standing them off—but we've got to hurry, for he's got poor cover."

Even while the scouts were talking the Colonel spoke a few quick words and the trumpeter at his side blared out a shrill call.

Before its echoes had died away the long column of horsemen which stretched nearly half a mile back was breaking up in apparent disorder. Orders were being shouted and repeated down its length, troop trumpeters were sounding short, sharp calls, and the whole mass was sorting itself out at a gallop. In an incredibly short time the three leading troops were in line and on their flanks and to the rear were two other long lines, each of two troops. The three leading troops, with Dick and B Troop in the centre, trotted forward toward the sound of the firing, two hundred horsemen abreast, the long line sagging here and there as parts of it met stretches of hard going.

As they came toward the top they could hear a wild din of whoops and shouts, weaving into the continuous rattling and crackling of rifle shots. As they came over the crest there lay before them a more gentle slope, descending to a narrow valley and the dry bed of a creek, behind which the ground again rose steeply. The valley was filled with a horde of naked, painted savages, lances brandished on high, feathered length of war-bonnets waving to the wind, and in nearly every warrior's hand a carbine of the latest improved type. Dashing back and forth among them was a huge naked giant, painted fiercely and mounted on a great black war-horse, captured from a slain trooper in some former battle—Bloody Lance himself. Here and there, on the further side of the field, were fallen Indians, and ponies dead, or writhing in their last agony, and others running loose, riderless. In the deeper part of the gully, around which the throng revolved, Hazelton and his men had entrenched themselves behind piles of saddles, blanket-rolls and dead horses. Their horses which had not been shot had been lost. The Indians raced around and past them and even in the minute that the men on the hilltop were watching, a few score savages, formed in a loose body and shrieking and yelling, galloped straight at the little band in the ravine. The sound of single shots rose to a continuous rattle, like the noise made by a small boy drawing a board across a picket fence. Dick could make out Hazelton walking quietly back and forth behind his men. In a few seconds there were so many empty saddles in the charging force that the survivors veered off and rode by the flanks of the defenders, shrieking their defiance and shooting their carbines as they galloped.

"Pretty work," muttered Dick to himself. "Good old C Troop!"

Colonel Raynor, riding in front of the three troops on the hilltop, turned to his adjutant. "Get down there quick," he said. "Let the men on the right to follow right in and take care of them. Ten Major Horne to keep his two troops on the left out of

it and wait developments. . . . Trumpeter, sound the charge!"

Down the slope charged the troops, yelling and cheering. From the gully came an answering cheer which blended with the pounding of the hoofs and the rattling of the rifle-shots.

Now lack of organization told against the Indians. With this new and more formidable foe sweeping down on them, they galloped about in wild confusion, each man for himself. Some circled around the ends of the line which was held by Hazelton's troop and crossed to the farther side of the gully. Others apparently had some intention of standing to meet the charge. Most of them galloped around with no order or purpose.

As the charging line drew near to the scattered and confused Indians, the troopers began to shoot at them with their revolvers, without for an instant slackening their gallop. The Indians replied with their carbines, even those who were in full flight from the rushing avalanche, turning in their saddles to shoot back. Here and there a trooper reeled in his saddle or fell to the ground, but the line rushed on unchecked. In another moment the whole scattered force of the Indians was making its escape across the gully and up the opposite hill. Hazelton and his dismounted men could not, at first, fire at them, for fear of shooting into the approaching troops, but as they swept past his flanks and up the slope, C Troop's carbines took heavy toll.

When the charge had swept down to the gully it was checked. The obstacle was too deep and the banks too precipitous for troopers to ride over and keep any semblance of order, and Colonel Raynor had no mind to let scattered and disorganized groups of men go swarming up the hill with no more cohesion than the Indians themselves had. The halt was sounded and, an instant later, the dismount. "Line the bank of the gully," was the order, "and open fire!" And, to an orderly, his command was: "Back to Major Horne now — quick! Tell him to cross with his command 'way up there to

the left, where the ravine is flattened out a bit—to go on beyond there a quarter of a mile, then swing in and hit 'em on the flank, charging right across our front. Tell him we'll mount and go ahead when we see him begin to swing in. That'll fix 'em."

Then he turned to the group of officers at his side. "Now then," he said, "slow fire. You see they've begun to stop running on that slope yonder and we don't want to drive 'em too far before Horne gets in. Let 'em think we're short of ammunition or afraid of 'em—anything they like."

Between the troops which had just swept down and the men whom they had rescued there was no time for congratulations or thanks for their deliverance. The job was only half done. When the fresh troops had swept into the gully, some of Hazelton's men, in their excitement, had climbed out and started on foot to pursue the fleeing Indians up the slope. Hazelton and his sergeants had, by much shouting at them, got them back to the gully, to wait until the real advance should begin; all except one man who had been the foremost. Running on ahead of the others he had not known that his comrades had stopped and gone back. As order began to emerge from the momentary confusion of establishing the line in the gully and getting the horses under cover, Hazelton saw his trumpeter lying on the ground a hundred yards up the slope. At almost the same instant, from a group of dismounted Indians hugging the ground farther up, one man sprang up and ran toward the fallen soldier.

"Get him!" Hazelton jerked out to his men.

A burst of scattered shots rang out, but the Indian ran unhurt, brandishing his knife in the air. Hazelton grabbed a carbine from the trooper nearest him and started toward the trumpeter. Ten feet away he fired his carbine from his hip, still running. The Indian staggered, but came on, his knife drawn back for a lunge. They met at the man's body. Hazelton ducked to one side, seized his carbine with both hands at the

muzzle and swung the butt down like a sledgehammer on the Indian's head, killing him instantly. Falling in a heap with the dead man from the force of his own blow, he quickly regained his feet and knelt down by the trumpeter. The man was still living. He picked him up, slung him over his back and started back to his line at a trot, while a fusillade rang out from the Indians.

In the meantime a dozen soldiers had sprung out of the gulley here and there, and rushed forward to help him, but because of the difficulty of getting a horse up the steep bank and into the open, all of them were dismounted. Dick, watching the scene in the instant of its happening, had flung himself on Defiance, picked out a low place in the bank and jumped his horse up. Now, from far off on the right, he was galloping toward Frank, using his spurs as Defiance had never felt them before. He quickly outdistanced the men on foot, but tearing down the slope toward him came another horseman, a splendid savage figure, naked, shining with grease and sweat, the long plumes of his war-bonnet streaming out behind him—Bloody Lance, on his powerful black horse.

The Indians stopped firing, lest they hit their Chief. The soldiers stopped too, as the two horsemen raced toward the same point. Dick had seen instantly that until Bloody Lance was disposed of there was no rescue for Frank. He altered his course and made straight for the charging chief. The galloping animals met, and passed so close that their riders' knees brushed each other. As they came together Dick fired his revolver and the Indian his carbine. Both riders remained steady in their saddles as they swept by and their horses carried them apart.

With rein and voice and knees Dick stopped Defiance so sharply that the horse went down on his haunches. Then he swung him about and started back to meet the Indian again. Bloody Lance was struggling to stop his horse and face his antagonist in the same way, but had

not yet succeeded, so that Dick rode at him from behind. As he came up, the Indian turned in his saddle. Dick aimed his revolver, but did not fire, waiting until they should be close enough to make certain of not missing. He did not fire at all. Suddenly the fierce leer on the Indian's face changed to an expression of angry disappointment. His body sagged and, with the next jump of his horse, fell to the ground, almost under Defiance's hoofs. Dick slipped his revolver back in the holster and rode toward Frank, who had now almost got back to safety. Two of the dismounted men reached him almost at the same time. A score of others, mounted and dismounted, were swarming out of the gully. An instant's glance showed Dick that the man Frank was carrying was dead and that Frank himself was hit.

"Put him down, old man," he said. "These men will take him, and you get on this horse."

Frank relinquished his burden and said stupidly: "Never mind. Give me your stirrup and I'll be all right."

"Not a bit of it," said Dick. "You . . . catch him there, quick!" He called out to one of the men who had just come up, as Frank began to sway on his feet. "Lift him up here over the front of the saddle."

And so, with his friend's dead body across the neck of his horse, and shots spattering all about him, he rode back to the line. When they lifted Frank off the horse, laid him on the ground, and covered his face, Dick slid from the saddle. As his feet touched the ground his knees gave way for an instant, but he steadied himself with his arm over the horse's neck.

"What's the matter?" asked the Colonel anxiously. "Are you hit?"

"Yes. I think he got me when we came together there. He never knew it though," he added with a little smile.

Then his hold on the horse's neck relaxed and he slid down to the ground. An hour later he died, shot through the lungs.

PART FOUR

LXI

ISABEL had once read an imaginative description of drowned men who never reached the bottom of the sea, but remained in its middle depths, endlessly swaying to and fro. The description came back to her now, and it was she herself who was suspended, unable, try as she would, to find anything solid under her feet. The voices of affection came to her as from an immense distance and through an impenetrable mist. There were times when she appeared to herself to be two persons, the one who could neither sink altogether in those horrible depths, nor yet rise above them, and the other who guarded the poor wretch from making a sound of self-betrayal. Yet to the friends anxiously watching her, she appeared self-controlled and sane, but so aloof that their affection could not reach her.

In the end, it seemed to her that it was Dr. Brenton's hand which grasped hers and pulled her up.

She was living with him; that was taken by them both as a matter of course. It was to him that her spirit clung when she began to come back to life. Lydia wrote to her—a letter overflowing with the proper sentiments, with perhaps some real feeling underneath the phrases. She begged Isabel to come to them, "at least for a time," adding, "Your dear father wishes me to ask you." Isabel did not refuse to make the visit—simply pushed it aside. When Cassie, whose grief was only less than her own, came back from New York a second time to persuade her to go home with her, she went; but returned quickly. Cassie had her own life to live and much happiness still left to her. Isabel was glad of that,

and some day she might not mind looking on. Just now all she wanted was Uncle Brenton.

When she had emerged somewhat from her apathy she could shed a few tears in Mrs. Gifford's motherly embrace, but talking, and not tears, relieved her then, and it was to Dr. Brenton that she could sometimes talk of Dick. Always she was to look back to the drives with him over the country roads, up and down the hills, waiting in a sort of stupid blank patience while he stopped in this or that house on professional visits. He kept her out of doors as much as possible.

"It is curious," she said to him one day, "how my life has been lived in episodes, and how definitely a door has closed on each one when it has ended. Miss Pryor's school was such a dear world to me. When I left there it was as if I had crossed a gulf. To be sure, Miss Pryor has written me some wonderful letters, and Margaret and I write occasionally, and there have been wedding cards now and then, but the life was ended. And it had been so very real and vivid. And then the parsonage. And now all my army life and friends. I love them—and I loved it all. Oh, Uncle Brenton!" she broke out passionately. "Dick loved it so! He loved his life—better, I'm sure, than he could love any other. I suppose—I believe—he *is* living somewhere. I can't believe that anything so alive as he was could be just snuffed out—but I'm sure he loved this best—and me! It's so cruelly unjust, not merely to me, but to him."

How could he answer her, when, in truth, he felt very much as she did?

"My dear," he said at last, "you've got to hold on to something. You've got to believe that even if one doesn't want to go away from what one knows and cares for, it won't be to a cold, unnatural place. There may be pleasant natural comfort there too—and good work to do."

"He hasn't got *me*! And then—oh, my point of view is of the earth—I can't feel that any joys of an immaterial existence can make up for the warm, bodily,

human touch. If I could feel his hand on mine!" She broke into unusual tears. . . .

Another day he asked if she didn't want her friend Margaret to visit her.

"I used to want her," she answered, "but there never seemed to be a right time for Lydia to have her. Now—I don't want her quite yet. I only want you."

"Don't you ever feel like writing?" he asked at another time. "You might write something now that you would be glad to acknowledge."

She shook her head. "I haven't any mind," she said. "At least, not any consecutive mind. No, I want no companion but you, and no occupation but driving about with you—as long as you'll have me."

One Sunday morning, during the first months of her bereavement, Dr. Brenton was startled to see her come downstairs, as the church bells were ringing, dressed in her formal mourning costume, with bonnet and veil.

"Going to church?" he asked.

She stood hesitating in the doorway. "I suppose so," she said. "I don't really want to, but—Dr. Harrison was so very nice to me when he came to see me. I suppose I am doing it out of politeness to him."

"Want me to go along?"

"No. If you don't mind, I'd rather go by myself."

In fact, Dr. Harrison had shown much tact at the time when, without urgency, he had suggested to her the consolations of religion.

"I am not religious," she had said to him frankly, "and when people talk about resignation and about being 'reconciled', they only make me angry. I think one bears a thing because one has to. There's nothing else to do about it."

He did not press her, showed no disapproval, didn't even ask her to go to church. And now she was going, simply to show him her gratitude.

She got there early and slipped into the Malden pew without meeting anyone. In the bottom of her heart was a little hope that she might find some comfort. But

the churchgoing was not a success. Stifling behind her heavy veil, she did not dare raise it because she found her composure leaving her. The music brought tears which she struggled to control. The pew was conspicuous and she was well aware of the sympathetic glances which were sure to be turned on her. Not for anything would she break down. And why, she wondered, with a flash of anger, why must there be such an insistent physical side to the emotions of the soul? Why must the tears streaming from her eyes also involve the swabbing of her nose? She rebelled against her body; and her struggles with it quite precluded any sense of spiritual uplifting. During the sermon, which she scarcely heard, she at last compelled herself to a stony composure and sat waiting with what patience she could compel, for the ordeal to be over. It was only just at the end when, kneeling, she happened to turn her head a little, that she became aware that Lily Hazelton was sitting in the pew beside hers. Lily was kneeling, her long veil flowing back—and surely there never were mourning garments so black as Lily's—her fair, sad face upturned, eyes closed, hands clasped, a lovely image of Grief assuaged by Religion.

A wave of repulsion swept over Isabel. So she and Lily had been sitting side by side all through the service. She had forgotten where the Brainards had their pew. She knew how the tableau had gratified Lily and could feel the unction with which she had regarded the touching sight which they must have presented—the two beautiful young women widowed by the same cruel blow. She had already endured much from Lily and had been hard put to it to evade her. She couldn't, positively she couldn't bear to be spoken to by her after the service was over—nor by anybody else. Abruptly she rose from her knees and quickly and quietly made her way down the aisle and out of the door. Oh, no! she wouldn't try it again.

As regarded the great issue she had not failed in generosity. Dick had given his life for his friend and

he would not have been Dick if he had held back. Even in her bitterest grief she knew that. But must she then take Lily into a close partnership for the rest of her life? She had never been a match for Lily's clinging determination, but she vowed now to release herself.

Yet out of all her rebellious and unsuccessful experiments Isabel did bring a tangible though unorthodox creed. She believed, as she had said, that her husband still lived—somewhere. There were moments when she could fancy that she felt his presence near her. She thought that if she could only be good enough she would join him some day. But being good didn't mean going to church, or even saying one's prayers, but living up to his standards. Hadn't she once told him that it was good for the soul to live with him? Well, what she had to do now was to live up to him, as far as she could. She promised herself that since she accepted no dictation from outside, she would always respect her own scruples. She would follow the light that she saw, and perhaps it would grow brighter. She evolved the theory that if she did not make the spiritual side of her nature dominate the material side, there could be no reunion with Dick, who himself must be constantly advancing. So she made her vows. But she could not, after all, see anything pleasant in the future existence. It was only that she must try to be where Dick was.

LXII

ONE day Dr. Brenton asked Isabel if she would help him with a little matter of bookkeeping. "You ought to learn something about business," he said, "and this would be a real help to me."

To her surprise, she developed an aptitude for the details of affairs. Gradually she assumed more and more the position of a secretary; and it was then that she really came to appreciate the benevolence of a country doctor. The calls he made and the calls which were made on him were duly noted, but when it came to making out bills she was continually told that this bill was to be made smaller than his very moderate regular price and that one was not to be sent at all. In the matter of new babies his charges were always extraordinarily low.

"I don't believe in making it so expensive to have children," he said. "Of course one might say that when a woman pays so exorbitantly in her own person, a man might well pay a good sum out of his pocket. But among people in moderate circumstances—as the majority of people are in a place like this—it comes out of the woman in the end. She is the one who works a little harder and does without things a little more to pay the doctor. No, we'll let the babies into the world as cheaply as we can, poor little souls."

"And oh, if I only had a baby!" sighed Isabel in her heart.

From seeing their names on the books she grew to take an interest in some of the patients. There was a Mrs. Barnes to whom the doctor's visits never ceased. Nor did he ever send her a bill.

"But she has a nice little house," said Isabel, who had spent many half-hours waiting in the buggy at that

gate. "I believe she could pay something, and perhaps if she had to do that, she would get well."

"Possibly it might have been so at one time," said the doctor. "But not now."

At the moment, they were driving up a long hill, the reins lying on the horse's neck. Above them, a little breeze went sighing through the trees, detaching the red and yellow leaves which dropped slowly, flecking the road before them. It was a woodland road and the day was lovely and mild. Isabel's black hat cast a shadow over her eyes, but did not hide the curve of her cheek. Dr. Brenton, looking around at her, rejoiced that the cheek had regained its perfect outline and was tinted with its former loveliness. Now, after nearly a year and a half of his care, the child was really well, he said to himself. That her eyes were grave and the line of her lips sad was no more than must be expected. No, her face would never be quite as it had been before. He sighed and wondered what life would yet bring her. She was still so near the beginning.

"So she really has something the matter now?" said Isabel.

The doctor gathered up the reins before he answered. They had got to the top of the hill and were now starting down on the other side, toward a group of houses dominated by a country store.

"Yes," he said soberly, "there's something the matter now."

They drew up at Mrs. Barnes's house and he gave the reins to Isabel and got out. She watched him as he opened the gate and went up the path and into the door, and then settled herself for a long wait. Mrs. Barnes always kept the doctor as long as she could. He was too good to her, Isabel thought. But then he was always too good to everybody, to herself most of all. What would she have done without him, all this long, dreadful time? Her eyes moistened. If only she could really make it up to him! Then she smiled. Yes, she thought she could be sure that Uncle Brenton

was far happier with her than without her. She thought he would be glad if she would take a little more interest in some of his poor people and she resolved to do it for his sake. She told him so when at last he came out and, taking the reins from her, turned Dolly's head toward home.

"I know I've been self-absorbed and horrid," she said, "and you have been an angel of patience with me. I've been sitting out here remorseing over my sins and making good resolutions, and I'm going to turn over a new leaf now and try to be a little real help. I'll make some clothes for those twin babies and go to see them in their horrid little smelly house. I'm sure it's smelly. It looks it from the outside. But I'll do that and anything else you want me to do."

He smiled at her affectionately. "Good girl," he said. "Don't get so busy that you won't have time for me. You don't know what it is for me to have you to come back to, when I come out of the houses."

She thought there was an unusual gravity behind his smile. "Is Mrs. Barnes really very ill?" she asked.

"Yes." He did not usually discuss the ailments of his patients with her, but this time he went on. "She is hopelessly ill and she begs for an operation. It won't do any good."

"Then you won't do it?"

"I can't refuse. If there *were* any hope it would be an operation—and she won't believe that there isn't. She insists, and I've told her I'd do it. A country doctor has to be a surgeon, too, in an emergency. If we only had a hospital—or any trained nurses. The day will come when even country towns will have them, and I hope I'll be here."

"Would you like me to be a trained nurse and help you?"

"You? Heaven forbid! You've no vocation for it—and you need a pretty loud call to keep you up to it. I'd never interfere if you had the call, but believe me, you never will have it."

She persisted in playing with the perfectly new idea. "I'd like to help you," she said.

"It would have to be a different motive from that," he replied. "Either a distinct vocation, or else a financial necessity which compels one to drill oneself into efficiency. You have neither. You have other things—the things which make you a heart's delight. So be satisfied."

"I ought to be." She had a glow at her heart warmer than anything she had felt since she lost Dick.

Dr. Brenton flicked his whip at a willing horse. "I've got to make haste. This thing must be done at once. I must get a man to help me—Denham, if I can find him—and some sort of a nurse."

"Drop me anywhere."

"No, you can hold Dolly while I stop at one or two places."

They found Dr. Denham and a nurse of sorts, whom Denham was to take out with him. Then Dr. Brenton went home and got the things he needed and was off again, telling Isabel not to expect him until she saw him. Norah would have something for him to eat whenever he might come in.

Isabel was left with an unusual sense of excitement and dread, almost as if illness had come into her own circle of life. She wandered about the house, unable to settle down to anything; and although she reproached herself for it, she felt a sort of resentment at Mrs. Barnes, who would not take the doctor's word for it that this was all useless. "Poor soul," she said to herself, "I ought not to blame her for grasping at a straw." Yet the feeling of resentment persisted,

It was the middle of the afternoon when Dr. Brenton got back. He looked tired and Isabel would not ask a question. He went into his office and closed the door and she sat down on a chair in the hall and waited. As he did not come out, she knocked at last.

"Won't you come and have some lunch?" she called.

He came out presently, patted her on the shoulder

and went with her to the dining-room. At the door he paused. "Of course you want to know," he said. "The poor soul is gone—never came out from the anæsthetic. And very lucky for her. She understood quite well what might happen."

"Had you operated?"

"Oh, yes, I had operated. Now come and talk to me."

She talked to him and saw him grow more cheerful; yet her resentment against Mrs. Barnes persisted.

LXIII

For the first time in Isabel's remembrance, Dr. Brenton was not well. Tired he had often been and willing sometimes to lie down on a sofa for a matter of half an hour, but never ill. He said he was not ill now, said it in an irritable tone which she had never heard before; and when she touched his hand it was hot. It was swollen too, and there was an angry mark on it.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing." He drew the hand away.

"Did you cut yourself the other day?" she asked quickly.

"It isn't a cut," he answered sharply. Never had he spoken to her in that tone.

Then he went to the kitchen door and told Norah to tell Michael to bring the horse around. When Isabel turned to get the hat and coat which always hung in the hall closet, he stopped her, saying, with all his usual gentleness:

"Not this time, Isabel. I'm taking Michael this morning."

She stood looking after them blankly. What could be the matter? She felt that something menaced.

And then her spirit rose in arms against the threat, whatever it might be. Of course there couldn't really be anything the matter—and if Uncle Brenton wanted, once in a way, to be cross, why shouldn't he? Only—she wished he would do something about that swollen hand.

To distract her mind, she got her gardening tools and some tulip bulbs which had arrived the day before and went out to plant them. She had told Uncle Brenton that she was going to make the bare patch below his office windows into a place of beauty, so she went

around to the back of the house and, setting herself to work, managed to keep her apprehension down below the surface of her mind. She was planting the last bulb when she heard her name spoken.

"Mrs. Malden!" said the voice.

She looked up. Dr. Denham was standing behind her. Throwing down her trowel, she stood up, all the anxiety which she had so carefully concealed from her own view now possessing her. She looked at Dr. Denham with terrified eyes.

"I know," she said. "He is dreadfully ill."

"Not dreadfully ill," he answered, in his professional reassuring voice, "but we must take care of him."

She fixed him with her eyes. He said to someone afterward: "You can't tell that woman any lies."

"Tell me," she said, "absolutely everything."

He told her. Dr. Brenton had not exactly cut his hand, but in tying an artery the thread had cut halfway through the skin. In an ordinary case it mightn't have done any harm, but Mrs. Barnes's case was a bad one. The operation ought never to have been insisted on. Well, it might not do fatal harm, but he wouldn't conceal from her that it was a serious matter. If Dr. Brenton were twenty years younger it would be less serious.

"He isn't old," said Isabel.

"No," said Dr. Denham, "but he isn't young exactly."

Then he told her just what the treatment must be. "We'll fight it for all we are worth," he said.

Isabel's hands, hanging by her sides, clenched. "Yes!" she answered.

To herself she vowed to fight and win. To lose! she refused to face the thought.

She did not decline the services of a nurse. "I will have all the help I can," she said. "And I don't care how much trouble anybody takes." She herself rose marvelously to the need.

"I'll never say again that you can't nurse," said Dr. Brenton, trying to smile at her through his nightmare

of fever and confusion. "You're a trained nurse by accident." And then, as he closed his eyes again wearily: "But don't go and fancy it's your vocation. It's only that I'm your vocation just now."

They fought for a week of grim days and grimmer nights. He knew, himself, that it was a losing fight, but Isabel would not believe it. The worse he grew the more she set her teeth and said that it should not be so.

"I'm sorry," he said to her. "Sorry for myself, for I was taking an uncommon interest in life lately and was so happy with you, Isabel—and I'm sorrier for you, my dear, than I am for myself. It's hard on you."

"Oh, Uncle Brenton!" she said desperately. "Can't you fight? Can't you fight?"

He had closed his eyes and seemed drifting away from her. He opened them again at her appeal. "I've been fighting, my child—fighting all I could. But it's no use." He roused himself with an effort of will. "We've got to face it, Isabel, you and I. You'll have to do without me, poor child. Don't stay alone—but better alone than with people you don't want. Pick up your courage, little girl, and make a good life of it." Then his eyes closed again and he was off in some dim, fever-world where she could not follow him.

"A good life!" she thought bitterly, as she sat looking down at him. Life was nothing but a brutal thing. But oh, if she could still conquer, if he could be made to stay with her, what a good life she would make for him and for herself. Why, she had only just waked up to realize how good he had been, how unselfish, how illimitably patient with her self-absorption; she was only now going to try to show him that she knew and appreciated; only now going to try to make him happy. No, she would not give up. She would still fight.

But Death takes small account of determination.

LXIV

ISABEL told herself that she could not bear it. Not even her husband's death, incomparable as that loss had been, had roused her to such a passion of rebellion. The greater loss she had been slowly learning to endure, but had felt that she could endure it only with the help of the man on whom she had been daily more and more depending, and daily learning to love with a more tender devotion. That he, too, should be taken from her—no, she could not bear it! And all the time she knew well that bear it she must. Death offers no alternative.

To those around her, with one exception, she showed nothing of the rage which possessed her. To Mrs. Gifford alone she could partly disclose herself. To the others she seemed entirely firm in her self-control. They said she was "wonderful."

During those first days the house was full of people; those who came to mourn for themselves, people of every age and degree, and those who came, not only for that, but chiefly to try to help her. Mrs. Gifford was there, day and night; Edmund, who hated the atmosphere of mourning, came to ask what he could do; Cassie came from New York; Anne, the niece whom she had once adopted as a cousin, hurried from Kansas—the funeral was delayed for her. And there was yet another visitor, unexpected by anyone. William Stirling, moved by memories of his boyhood and perhaps by other relents, had, without stopping to debate the impulse, come to Ptolemy and to Dr. Brenton's house. Isabel met him quite accidentally, as she was crossing the hall and, not seeing who he was, would have passed without raising her eyes, if he had not spoken.

"Isabel!" he said.

She stopped then and looked up. Amid all that was so strange and so monstrous, the sight of her father and the sound of his voice seemed to her no more strange than anything else.

"Yes, Father," she said, just as she used to say in the old days of the parsonage.

Then she waited, just as she used to wait, but for a moment he found nothing more to say. His ideas were undergoing an extraordinary readjustment.

This was not the daughter whose obduracy he had all these years resented—this black-garbed woman with the rigid, grief-stricken countenance. This was not a person with whom he could have any rights to maintain. She was infinitely remote from him and entirely his equal. His instinct was to be simply courteous, as to a stranger.

Under any other circumstances Isabel would have smiled incredulously at hearing herself addressed in the tone which she had heard her father use when he was being polite and not authoritative. Now she did not notice it. He asked her what he could do for her, and she told him there was nothing to be done—that everybody was very kind.

"The funeral," she told him, in her self-controlled, colorless monotone, "is to be from the church. There are so many who will come." She added, in careful explanation, "the Episcopal church." She said it in meticulous performance of a duty, and with absolute forgetfulness of the way it would strike him.

Dr. Stirling may have had some idea that he would be asked, or would offer, to render his tribute of service at that funeral, and it would have seemed to him a token of reconciliation. Certainly he had never thought to pass through the doorway of the Episcopal church in Ptolemy. Surely he was not quite himself that morning, for he did not hesitate when he said: "I shall be there."

He left her then, since he saw plainly enough that

she did not want him, but that evening, after the funeral was over, he rang her doorbell. He would not, however, ask for her by the name which was hateful to him.

"Can I see my daughter?" he asked Norah.

Norah, to whom he was anathema, replied with dignity that she would see if Mrs. Malden would see him. "Sure an' he knows she's his no longer," she said to herself, as she went upstairs with his message.

Isabel came down, although reluctantly. Why should he trouble her now? His new politeness, his unprecedented consideration, had not penetrated her consciousness. In this second interview she did become aware of it, but nothing seemed of consequence now. He found her as far removed from human intercourse as she had been used to find him.

It was a stiff interview. He ventured on no conventional utterance of sympathy; he refrained from religious commonplaces. Unconsciously to himself, he had dropped those commonplaces when he ceased to be pastor of a flock for whose religious welfare he felt responsible. He was too reserved, too shy, to speak about his revived feeling for the friend of his boyhood and he, surely, was the last person to whom she could have opened her heart. He asked if she had decided what to do now, and she answered that there was nothing to do; she was just going to stay there.

"You will be welcome in my house," he said. "I hope you will come to me." He thought afterward that he might have called it home to her, but at the moment it did not occur to him.

She did dully recognize the extraordinary concession which he was making and felt wearily that she must try to reply adequately, but she was weighed down by such an overwhelming fatigue that her brain would hardly supply her with words to answer him.

"Thank you," she said. "After a while—I am so tired now—and——"

"Yes, you must be tired," said her father (when did

he ever think of such a thing before?), "but later—I shall expect you later."

He would have been willing to say more if he had known how.

Isabel found unexpected comfort in Anne, the unknown adopted cousin of her childhood, divining in her some quality of her uncle. Anne was sympathetic and generous; sincerely glad that "Uncle John" had left his house and its contents to Isabel. "For," as she said, "now we know that all trace of him will not be wiped out from the place where he lived and worked and was loved."

Dr. Brenton had tried to be fair. He had left his little property, with the exception of the house, to his nieces, knowing that Isabel had an income which would suffice for moderate living; and knowing also, that Anne and her sister, both of them married, were not in need, he had gratified himself by giving the house with all that was in it, to Isabel. It would, he had said to himself, provide her with a foothold to which she could come back, even if she chose to wander away from it for a time. He knew that she would keep it, for love of him, even if at first its associations should be painful; and for her part, she was glad to have it, even while she wondered how she could bear to stay there without him.

In the course of her work as his secretary she had learned something about the management of her own affairs. He had seen to that. Now she found herself with a sufficient income to keep up the little place and to live comfortably. There seemed, for the moment, nothing for her to do but to stay there. Besides, Dr. Brenton had said to her: "Stay here for the present, in your own place, with command of your own life—but get someone to stay with you. That friend of yours—Margaret. Get her to come."

At first it seemed that she did not care to have Margaret or anyone else, but presently when Anne had gone

back to her husband and children, and when she realized that Cassie was staying longer than was convenient to herself, when Mrs. Gifford was anxiously begging her to come to them for a time, and when finally Lydia wrote and offered to come to stay with her and take her back after a while to the "home" which was awaiting her, she wrote to Margaret.

With Margaret's coming the anxious friends were more at ease, feeling in her presence an influence which was calming and sustaining. It was an experiment which might have been a failure, for the two had not met for a dozen years, but the old tie held good. As of old, Isabel had a charm for Margaret, quite irrespective of sympathy and pity; and as of old, Isabel looked up to her, and now found as much comfort in her as it was possible for her to find in anyone.

Margaret said she was not in a hurry. There had never been a time when her family could spare her so well. Her parents had died and the young brother and sister were grown up and able to look after themselves. She could stay; yes, she could even live for a while with Isabel.

It was some months later, when Isabel was still plunged in black depression, still convinced that life was but a brutality, and unable to look for anything beyond, that Margaret proposed that they should go abroad.

"Dick and I always meant to go together," said Isabel drearily.

Margaret said no more at the time, but some days later remarked casually how much she had always wanted to go and had always been prevented by some duty. After all, thought Isabel, why not do something that Margaret wanted?

It was easy to make arrangements. Norah and Michael would take care of the house and could so easily get well-paid work to do that she would be at no great expense for them. Judge Gifford said he would be only too glad to look after all business affairs; Cassie would take their passage and they must start from her house; everybody

was glad to help. Edmund came with guide-books and spent several evenings with them, giving them all sorts of advice and information for which they found reason to bless him.

One thing, however, Margaret insisted on. Isabel must go and visit her father before she sailed. He had written and renewed his invitation, but she had no desire to accept it.

"I can't understand it," said Margaret. "Even if he wasn't kind once—he wants to be kind now, and he is your father."

"No," said Isabel, "I can't expect you to understand, unless you had known all along. There are things that no telling will ever make understandable—you've got to live them. And I don't want to tell you. It doesn't seem worth while—and I hate to be reminded."

"But with all that, I think you ought to go. Then you will have done your part."

Isabel sighed. "How conscientious you are."

"I don't know. I can't help looking at his side too. And perhaps it's a matter of self-indulgence. I like to feel that I have done my part and don't have to regret anything. And after all, Isabel, there's nothing like the tie of blood."

"How lucky you are, to be able to feel that! If I do go, it will be to please you and have your good opinion."

She went and stayed a week. In the end, she was not sorry to have made the visit; and the strangeness of it roused her interest as nothing else had done. She even discovered that she had some sense of humor left.

Her father was extremely polite to her, treated her as an honored guest. She thought sometimes that he must have forgotten that theirs was the relation of father and daughter. In that case, he could forgive her for having been born. She studied him with some keenness and fancied that his present occupation, with its purely intellectual demands, had somewhat blunted the sharpness of his religious—or should she say, his theological, convictions and prejudices. According to Lydia, he had grown

into the habit of spending his life between study and classroom, avoided social gatherings and never entered a pulpit if he could help it. Isabel was far from suspecting that he had never gone into a pulpit with quite the same certainty of his infallibility since those last words which she had spoken to him in the parsonage at Ptolemy. Rage at her as he might, those words had struck home.

As for the rest, she was sure it must be a great relief to him to be free from all gatherings in which women largely figured. Heavens! How the women of the congregation did use to flock around him!

Lydia, after remaining apparently of the same age ever since her stepdaughter could remember, had now grown distinctly middle-aged. Her hair, elaborately arranged as ever, showed some gray among its sandy coils, her face was lined, and her figure, formerly so youthful in its slenderness, had taken on the unmistakable middle-aged thickness. Yes, Lydia was growing old, but she was as sententious as ever; very polite, impressively and dreadfully sympathetic. Every word, every tone, was intended to remind the afflicted guest that her sorrows were being considered with a wonderful, an unprecedented tenderness. Isabel froze under it.

On her return Margaret told her that the visit had done her good.

"Perhaps," said Isabel, "but not for any reason you would think creditable. Lydia was awful—and so ridiculous. I could see it even when she touched me on a bare nerve. And my father was so surprising and perplexing."

"And you found you had misjudged him just a little?"

"No, not that at all. I don't believe I had misjudged him, except in thinking that he was set so hard in his mould that he could never change in the least. He has changed and it was—interesting. Don't expect any filial virtues from me. I think I'm set pretty hard in my own mould."

She suddenly broke into a laugh, then gasped and was threatened with hysterical tears. After a moment she

controlled herself. "Margaret!" she said. "I haven't laughed for so long that the muscles of my face are stiff."

She left the room in tears; but Margaret told herself that the visit had done her good; and perhaps, Margaret optimistically thought, she loved her father a little more than she knew.

They both made another visit before sailing.

"I have so often wanted to see Miss Pryor again," said Isabel one day. "She has written to me several times. Her letters are different from anyone else's."

"It would be perfectly easy," returned Margaret. "We can go up there for a day from New York."

Presently Isabel found it all arranged. A letter from Miss Pryor told her how welcome they would be.

Just to be back in the old place gave her more pleasure than she would have thought possible. To walk along the village street with Margaret, recognizing old landmarks; to sit once more on the step under the Memento Mori arch and recall those talks of her precocious childhood; to find out what had become of the various village notabilities—all this took her astonishingly out of herself. With Miss Pryor she felt humble, reverential, ashamed of the poor showing which she knew that she must make if judged by the standards of that lofty and ardent soul, but warmed and comforted by the affection in which she was enfolded; conscious that, as always, she was regarded with eyes which saw her as better, far better than she was. And, as always, she felt the inspiration of that regard. She wanted, not to lay bare her imperfections, but to get rid of them, to justify the estimate in which she was held. When Miss Pryor asked her, with a tenderness which robbed the question of all intrusiveness, whether she had at last found in religion some solace for the present, some hope for the future, she had to confess that she was without religion, and then ventured, hesitatingly, to say something of those aspirations, so little remembered since Dr. Brenton's death, toward a fitness for a future existence.

Miss Pryor regarded her thoughtfully. "You are tak-

ing your own by-path," she said, "and the way is more difficult. But you will learn. You have learned very early how full of renunciation life must be. Be true to yourself, as I am sure you are—your way will lead you in the end to God and His love."

"Renunciation?" said Isabel questioningly, and fell into a moment's thought. Then she raised her eyes again to Miss Pryor's face. "I don't know what renunciation is," she said. "Things have been taken away from me—violently—and I have borne it, because I must. I have never renounced anything in my life."

Miss Pryor looked at her for a moment in silence. In her eyes was infinite pity—a pity born of the foresight with which she gazed along the vista of the path yet to be trodden by that ardent and self-centred soul. "My poor child!" she said.

There was so much that she could have added—words of ripest wisdom. She left them unspoken. Here was one who would learn only of life. But the dejection which the old feel when they realize how useless to the beloved young are the fruits of their knowledge and experience was quickly overborne by her confident faith in one so dear to her. Through whatever hardships, Isabel was sure to reach the goal in the end. One injunction only she gave her as they parted: "Through everything, hold fast to the things of the spirit."

Isabel, bending her tall young form to the tender embrace, could only whisper, "I will."

It was a promise which she never wholly forgot. And, in the long quiet hours when, wrapped in her rug, she lay in a steamer chair on deck, she pondered that idea of renunciation. It seemed to her, now that her attention had been drawn to it, that nearly everyone in the world except herself was at least ready to renounce something. Dick gave his life for his friend. And when he went into the army did he not hold himself ready to give it for his country? One might perhaps answer that he took the chance for the sake of the profession he loved; but he had offered to renounce that profession for his father's

sake. And old Peter Malden—he too knew renunciation when he refused Dick's offer. And Dr. Brenton had given his life; and had always stood in daily readiness, as she realized now. And there were others. There was Margaret. . . .

At the beginning of their journey Isabel had been plunged in deeper melancholy than ever. She was constantly recalling the plans which she and Dick had made to go abroad together. She told herself and Margaret that it seemed unfair that she should be doing it without him. And Margaret was so patient with her; yet it was the fulfilment of Margaret's dream to go abroad. It was horrid of her to spoil her friend's pleasure.

With her resolve to renounce the indulgence of her grief, some of her old ardor awoke in her.

LXV

ISABEL surprised herself and Margaret by her keenness as a sightseer. She was indefatigable. When not actually standing before pictures and statuary or pacing the aisles of old churches, she was studying diligently in preparation for the next day's excursions. Nor did the beauties of nature find her less responsive. Sunset and sunrise, gentle summer landscape and snow-covered Alpine peak, she stood rapt before them all.

"I used to think," said Margaret one day, "that you were singularly indifferent to nature."

Isabel turned to her with a sigh and a smile. "I've always been so occupied with myself and my own affairs," she said. "I hadn't any attention left for anything else. Are all very young people like that, I wonder. Was I unusually self-absorbed, Margaret?"

"I think perhaps you were," said Margaret, truthful, even though fond. "But you're not so now," she added.

"I haven't any affairs now," said Isabel sadly. "And now," she added, laughing ruefully, "I go the other way about to tire you out. Poor Margaret! My extremes must be wearing. Why don't you let me go sightseeing alone sometimes. I know you get tired sooner than I."

"You know why," replied Margaret with a shrug. "That man has hired a carriage to-day. It stands a little way from ours and he is following you on foot at a discreet distance. It might be at an indiscreet nearness if you were alone."

"Good gracious! I never knew it. After all, it may be on your account and not on mine."

"Don't be foolish! And Isabel—don't go out to see the sunset with Mr. Hillquist any more."

"Why, he's an old man," said Isabel indignantly. "I might be his daughter."

"That doesn't make any difference."

"Oh, how stupid everyone is!" cried Isabel.

In fact, the task of chaperoning Isabel was not altogether easy. She considered herself still Dick's wife, hated the word "widow" so sensitively that she never used it about anybody if she could avoid it, and shrank from its use with regard to herself with an abhorrence of which she never spoke to anyone. Feeling thus, she met men on exactly the same footing as when her husband was alive and was entirely unobservant of their occasional misunderstanding of the situation until her eyes were forcibly opened. When this happened, she was inclined to be almost as much insulted as if she were still the wife of a living husband.

"But you can't blame them," Margaret would say. "You are so perfectly friendly with them, and how can they know?"

"I suppose there are advantages in suttee," Isabel once replied to her. "Then there are no mistakes made and you can die just at the time when you don't care about living. Later, life gets hold of you again somehow. Oh, yes, I can feel it getting hold of me. I'll never be more than half a person, and yet that half does care about things—people and places and art, and even the physical things—heat and cold, food and clothes. By the time I have to die I shan't want to. And yet—to grow old when the person you hope to live with again has perhaps stayed young! Do you suppose they stay young? Do you remember the story of the bride whose husband fell into a glacier, and the glacier moved so slowly that years and years passed before his body came in sight—and she lived for that moment, and came and saw him, a fresh youth—kept young in the glacier—while she was a withered old woman. Do you remember? I sometimes wonder if that is partly why people marry again—so that they may have someone like themselves. Only, I don't see how they can do it."

"You don't think it's wrong?"

"Certainly not—for those who want to."

After another misadventure in friendship Margaret said to her: "Isabel, you would get along more easily if you didn't really prefer men to women."

"Do I?" said Isabel in surprise. Then she fell into thought. "I don't think I did, as a girl," she said. "I always felt then that I liked women best and understood them best. After that I didn't think anything about it. We saw a great many men and they were my good comrades as well as Dick's. I got to know them better and perhaps I do like their point of view and their way of disposing of the affairs of life. Yes, perhaps I do like them best. It's unfortunate, isn't it?"

"Why not try a study of women for a while? It would be so much less complicated."

"*Pension* women?" said Isabel with a grimace. "I love young girls and get on with them, but these women who flock over Europe!" She threw out her hands with an expressive gesture. "Do you think they reward study? Which do you prefer—Mrs. Bayley with her fluffy auburn wig, or Mrs. Westerfield with her smooth dark one? I'm so tired of them all—of the yards of darned net and the reams of second-hand Baedeker, and the frisky middle-aged women and the doddering old ones."

"Do you want to go home?" This was at the end of the first year.

"Heaven forbid! We neither of us want to go home. Why, we've just begun to see things. But don't you think we could afford to take a little apartment and keep house? And then move on and take a little apartment somewhere else. We could have a lovely time all by ourselves—with now and then just the few people we're always sure to meet and like."

They tried it and liked it. They made a slow progress from place to place, now spending too much money and then making up for it by an economical sojourn in some remote, unfrequented, but not uninteresting corner. This way of living was quite to their minds, giving them privacy and a certain status, while in each place the housekeeping was a fresh adventure. They saw inter-

esting things, studied interesting languages, and made enough acquaintances to keep them from feeling isolated. Sometimes they saw friends from home. Twice Edmund Gifford came their way and stopped near them for a time, giving them always a fresh start in their pursuits.

"He's a very stimulating person," said Margaret.

"And very determined to make us into his good pupils," added Isabel.

Nevertheless, she enjoyed being his pupil again; reading the books and seeing the things which he recommended; and she missed him when he went away. In some ways she seemed to herself to have become a different person from the one she had been before. Not that she had ceased to think of Dick daily, but he formed the background rather than the foreground of her thoughts. By sheer force of having to do without him, she had got used to his absence.

The one disturbing thing was the occasional suggestion by Margaret of a return home and a separation.

"I wish we could always live together," said Isabel, "and always like this."

They were spending a domestic morning, resting from outings and mending their clothes. Margaret's sleek dark head was bent over the stocking she was darning. She drew the long thread of silk carefully through before she answered.

"Do you realize how long we have been together?" she asked at last. "And, incidentally, how long I have been away from my family? Do you realize it's three years? I never dreamed of staying so long—but I've loved it."

"Your family don't need you."

"I'd be sorry to think that."

"Are you needing *them*?" asked Isabel quickly. "I know I'm a selfish pig, but oh, Margaret, I don't believe anybody needs you as I do. But of course—they are your own. Have you been hearing anything in particular?"

"Clara has been getting engaged," said Margaret, between a smile and a tear. "And to somebody I've never

seen! She wants to be married soon, and she is going to California to live. And Fred will be alone. I must go, Isabel."

"I see. Oh, dear, doesn't Fred want to get married too?" She let her work slip to the floor and walked to the window. All flavor, all interest, had suddenly gone out of life. . . .

But—come now, said her soul to her, shall those fine ideals which you cherish go for nothing? Shall it be for nothing that you have lived with unselfish Margaret these three years?—After a few moments she turned and went back to her friend.

"Well, it's all settled," she said. "This chapter is closed. It has been a good one. Now—let me help you all I can. Doesn't your bride want us to get her trousseau for her? I'm sure she dreams of Paris finery."

"She does," said Margaret, "and I'm the worst shopper in the world."

"But I'm not," said Isabel. "We'll go to Paris and then home."

She gathered up her work and went to her own room, and if she shed a few tears there, she never let her friend know. To Margaret's suggestion that she might find another friend to stay with her, instead of going back to America, she returned a decided negative.

"Never!" she said. "No, I'll just go back to my own house. Only I'll stop and see Cassie first. I'd like to see Cassie."

LXVI

AFTER all, coming home proved to be, in its way, an adventure like another. Cassie was her old satisfactory self and it was delightful to come back to her. Lansing seemed a little changed in some way which Isabel did not trouble herself to analyze. He looked older and, while he had never appeared exactly robust, he was less so now. Cassie was always looking out for him, seeing that his food was right and persuading him to lie down before dinner.

"He works too hard," she told Isabel. "I suppose it's the price one pays for rapid success."

There were two children and Cassie was a devoted mother, but she had always subordinated everything to her husband's need of her. She had helped him immensely in his career, not by wire-pulling, but by sheer tact and pleasantness; and he frankly said that he could not have got along without her.

Cassie's welcome to Isabel was heartwarming. "It's such a joy to get you back at last," she said.

"I begin to wonder," said Isabel, "why I haven't come sooner—even if I had gone back again."

"I'm so glad you are ready for us now," said Cassie simply.

"You are just the same. You never fail to understand. And I—I seem to myself in some ways so different. And yet, Cassie, I'm not, really." Her voice trembled on the last words. Cassie had brought Dick vividly before her.

"You're wonderful," said Cassie.

At thirty-three, Isabel was at the height of her beauty. She had not, to any perceptible degree, lost the freshness of youth, and she had gained a poise and grace which in early youth had been lacking to her. Unconsciously she had acquired the bearing, the tone and accent of a woman

of the world; one might even say, a woman of the great world, although she had had no social experience to warrant such a claim. Cassie admired her enthusiastically and, to his wife's relief, Lansing did not now seem bored by her. His attitude toward her had been somewhat embarrassing on other occasions.

He had, in fact, been bored by Isabel when he first renewed his acquaintance with her. He was not in the least interested in the things that she cared for and they were both too self-engrossed to make much pretence of interest in each other's affairs. Later, when she came to his house, absorbed in her grief, he was sorry for her, but even more bored by her. He had not, therefore, looked forward to her visit with any anticipation of pleasure. He meant to be as patient as possible, on Cassie's account. Cassie really deserved that of him. The new Isabel was a delightful surprise. He mentioned the fact to his wife.

"I didn't think she had it in her to be anything but provincial," he said. "It's one more example of what can be done by getting out of one's rut. Did she really go into society over there—she and the old maid friend?"

"I feel like crowing over you," said Cassie. "I've always known Isabel's possibilities. No, I don't think they went into society much—if at all."

"And to-night we take her to the Lorimer ball." He was lying on his sofa, taking his rest before dinner. He sighed as he spoke—a sigh of physical weariness.

"Are you more tired than usual? Do you want to stay home?" She kept her tone casual. He didn't like anxiety.

"Oh, no, I'll be all right after dinner." He got up and, going to a cupboard, poured out a generous allowance of whiskey.

Cassie was growing to hate that cupboard. Nor did she approve of the amount of strong coffee which he usually took after dinner. But remonstrance irritated him and did no good.

Later, he was quite at his best and ready for enjoyment; and he and Cassie were both proud of Isabel. Under the

influence of European customs, she had gradually discarded the densely sombre garments which she might have worn all her life if she had stayed in Ptolemy. She had not brought herself to the wearing of bright colors, and her income did not permit any great outlay in dress, but her few and simple costumes were distinctly smart; and in the black evening gown which showed the long lines of her graceful figure and brought out the whiteness of neck and arms and the softly brilliant tints of face and hair, she was by no means the least noticeable figure in a crowd of well-dressed, dazzlingly bejeweled, and beautiful women.

Cassie, glancing at her across the ballroom, was freshly impressed by her. At the moment, Lansing was with Isabel, piloting her across the room. What a convenience it was to have him take some interest in her. Cassie was too secure in her happiness ever to give a thought to those far-off days when he had had his brief attack of infatuation for a lovely face; and her mind had been full of other things. She gazed at the two very happily until the crowd came in between and hid them from her sight; then turned with fresh attention to the man who was talking to her. Some man was always talking to her about himself and she always listened with intelligent sympathy.

Isabel, her eyes full of amused interest, was looking about her at New York's élite. "I haven't been to anything like this—well, of course I've never been to anything like this," she said. "We didn't have such choice assemblies at army posts, and certainly not in Ptolemy, and Margaret and I lived like mice most of the time we were abroad. And yet I'm oddly reminded of my very first party. I was only nineteen and it seemed to me the grandest affair possible."

"The point of view of nineteen——"

"Exactly. And I seem to have got it back, just for the moment. It's a sort of tiptoeing into adventure in an unknown world."

Fordyce looked at her with something of the amuse-

ment which he forgot that he had felt when she was eighteen and said naïve things to him. He reflected that, even while she was declaring herself a novice in the world of the socially elect she seemed, in looks and in manner and in the tones of her voice, to be a citizen of that very world. A citizen? She looked a queen, he said to himself.

"Stay by me," said Isabel, "and tell me who they are."

As she spoke, there came back to her a memory of Edmund Gifford taking her through the rooms of his father's house and pointing out to her the celebrities of the new university. Odd, how it all came back and almost made her homesick. Lansing, she thought, was hardly as amusing as Edmund had been on that occasion, and the people around her did not stimulate her interest nearly as much as had those professors and their wives.

But Lansing did his best to be entertaining and felt that he was successful. Isabel glanced and smiled and responded to his gossip—and he could not know that she had suddenly grown from nineteen to thirty-three.

She was quite thirty-three and at her best when she met some of the people, and was able to hold her own with them, ignorant though she was of their special language of small talk. She was reminded now of that dinner when she was an army bride and sat beside Colonel Raynor and felt so out of it all. But even then, she had in the end held her own. Now she cared far less; and that comparative indifference, added to her lovely face and distinguished carriage and the intent way in which she fixed those beautiful, dark-lashed gray eyes on the person who was talking to her, carried her through. On the whole, her début in New York society was singularly successful.

Yet when she went home and to her room she gazed into her mirror with eyes which saw not the present, but the past. And oh, how homesick she was for that irrecoverable past! "Oh, Dick!" she sighed softly, as she turned away and put out the light.

On those previous occasions when Isabel had visited Cassie, she had had little to do with the children. Grief-

absorbed, she had been only dimly aware of Katrina; and little Dicky's name and his blue eyes had stabbed her so sharply that she had only wanted to avoid the sight of him. Cassie, who had hoped that he might be a comfort to her, as he was to herself, was grieved, but tolerant. The time would come, she said to herself. She was justified in her patience. The time had come. Isabel's first visit to the nursery proved that.

For Katrina, the image of her father, tall for her age, slender and dark, somewhat aloof and chary of her favors to a new-comer, she had enthusiastic admiration. Katrina was an aristocrat and would be a beauty. At the sight of Dicky she caught her breath. That sturdy little figure, that frank, smiling face and, oh, those blue, blue eyes, how they pulled at her heart-strings! She knelt and held out her hands; and Dicky, after one good look, came running into her arms.

After that, his constant demand was for "Aunt Isabel." "Why doesn't Aunt Isabel come? Why does Aunt Isabel go out? Why doesn't she stay always?" Dicky was a child of "why."

Most of her gowns were black, but one evening when she went to the nursery to say good-night, she was wearing a white, satiny dress, of dim sheen and straight severe lines, a marvellously perfect setting for her beauty. Cassie, turning toward her as she came in, thought her the most radiantly beautiful creature she had ever seen and then turned away with a lump in her throat at the expression of her face as the children came to meet her. Even Katrina was impressed by the beautiful aunt and Dicky was too ecstatic for mere words. He put a hand softly on each side of her face as she stooped to him; then, suddenly turning away, he ran and picked up the box of soldiers which was his dearest treasure. He brought it to her, staggering a little under its unwieldiness, and laid it at her feet.

"I'll give you all my soldiers," he said, "if you'll stay here in that dress."

How like Dick he was—Dick, who had always loved to

see her in pretty clothes, and hated the black which she wore when his father died. She gave a little laugh which was half a sob. "Keep your soldiers, darling," she said. "I'll wear a white dress for you every evening when I say good-night." And she did, even when it meant a quick change afterward.

"If he were only mine!" she said to Cassie, as they went downstairs together. "It's wicked to be as envious as I am."

"Stay and take your share in him," said Cassie, putting an arm around her. "It's a pretty big share, you know. The rest of us are nowhere since you came."

"I can't stay always," said Isabel. What she did not say was that she longed to take him away and have him all to herself.

She seldom spoke of the child to his father; not with any intentional avoidance, but it did not occur to her to talk about him to Lansing. To-night, however, the boy was mentioned—perhaps by Cassie.

"He's a jolly little chap, isn't he?" said Lansing, with proper parental pride. "They are very satisfactory children, I think. Why do you look so startled? Mayn't a man say that much about his own children?"

She laughed with a little embarrassment. It would hardly do to say that she had never thought of Dicky as his child. It had seemed to her as if he only belonged to Cassie and herself.

"Perhaps," she said, rallying herself, "I look startled because you never said as much as that about them before."

"Still waters," said Cassie with a laugh. "Lansing never says much."

"But you can assure our guest that nevertheless, my heart is in the right place," added Lansing.

"I really don't see how it could be anywhere else, considering what you have," replied Isabel; and just then the first guest arrived. They were having a dinner that night.

But still it seemed to Isabel that Lansing had no real

part in Dicky, and she never talked to him about the child. Their intercourse was on different lines. She had become keenly interested in the larger affairs of the world, and it was of those, rather than of domestic matters or of the gossip of society that she encouraged him to tell her. Nothing could have been more impersonal than their conversation, or than her attitude toward him. He was Cassie's husband, a goodlooking and agreeable man, who knew a great many interesting things and imparted his information in an interesting way. Also, when one came to think about it, he was her brother-in-law. The episode of her girlhood was so far buried that its only result, as far as she was concerned, was an underlying feeling that he wasn't quite good enough for Cassie.

With him, the reverse experience was taking place. When, at the time of his marriage, she had remembered that episode, he had practically forgotten it. Now, it came back to his mind with a curious persistence; as also his later judgment of her provincialism. It seemed that his first estimate of her had been the correct one. He had seen her possibilities at the time when he had so nearly lost his head over her. And as for her beauty—there had never been any doubt about that. He lost himself sometimes in contemplation of it.

"You ought to have your portrait painted," he said to her one day.

Isabel had a perfectly unaffected knowledge of her beauty and, secure in it, never had to be self-conscious. "Before Time gets in his work?" she said laughing. "I shall have to bestir myself, for Time is getting ready for me. But I can't afford a portrait, you know. Besides, who should I do it for? There's nobody," she ended soberly.

"For the joy of the world," said Lansing.

"Hark to his gallantry!" she mocked. "Cassie, is it his habit to say such things?"

"For Dicky," said Cassie softly.

"Ah, for Dicky! I could even gladly spend a year's

income for Dicky. But what should I live on in the meanwhile?"

"I know an artist," said Lansing, "who would do it for pleasure and fame."

"Yes, Eric Dane would love to do it," said Cassie. "And then we'd save up and buy it for Dicky. And it would keep you with us longer." For Isabel had been talking about her return to Ptolemy.

They dropped the subject, but Lansing brought it up again. Every beautiful woman likes the idea of having her beauty perpetuated. When he invited Eric Dane to dinner, and the artist begged Isabel to sit for him, she was pleased to consent. It would be something to her to cheat Time, the beautiful woman's arch-enemy.

LXVII

THE weeks went by delightfully. Isabel found her taste of New York society one of the most stimulating of her adventures, totally different as it was from anything which she had known. There were advantages, she thought, in being merely a visitor. She brought to the scene a freshness of vision, a capacity for being amused at things which everybody else took for granted; and she was as little as possible occupied with the impression which she herself was making.

"When I was younger," she remarked to Lansing, "I might have been alarmed by your haughty dames. They are surely the last word in haughtiness. I love to watch them. I love it all."

Watching and listening with alertness, her imagination was, for the first time in years, awakened to vivid activity. She was seized with the long-dormant desire to weave tales out of what she saw and heard. Unconsciously following Dr. Brenton's advice, she had no impulse to use her material raw. Of all the stories she heard, there were none that she wanted to write down verbatim. But the sight of a happily married pair who seemed improbable as mates set her to building a whole tale, ending in that mating; or some incident, coming to her detached from all that had led up to it, took hold of her and would not let her go until she had constructed a plot and fitted it into place. The prospect of getting settled in her house at Ptolemy gave her unexpected pleasure, for there she could write at her leisure. Not but what she wanted to come back again. Never again, she told herself, could she bear a long separation from Cassie and Dicky. If Cassie would only lend her the boy sometimes! Mean-time, she scribbled on scraps of paper all sorts of bits; fragments of conversation, description and comments,

anything which seemed at the moment to demand preservation.

Her many social engagements would have left little time for such exercises of the intellect had it not been for the portrait. The sittings gave her some leisure for her mind. Not but what there was a good deal of conversation then too.

Ordinarily, Eric Dane knew well enough how to awaken the look of interest which he wanted to use in the cause of art. Indeed, it had been said of him that, in the matter of a woman's portrait, he never felt that he had entirely done justice to himself as an artist unless he had succeeded in arousing on the part of his subject a very particular interest in himself as a man. Tales were told of occasional disastrous results of his method. Perhaps that was the reason why mothers of tender débutantes had their own, but not their daughters' portraits painted by him. However that may have been, any effort which he made to excite a special interest on the part of the beautiful Mrs. Malden was a signal failure. He recognized but one obstacle to the infallibility of his attraction. To some other man he attributed the look of detachment which years before had intrigued Amy Boyd and Edmund Gifford.

Having an inquisitive mind, he kept his eyes and ears open, but made no discovery until, one day, Fordyce paid a visit to the studio during a sitting. Then he thought he had a clue, no less interesting because shocking. However, an artful playing of that line brought him to the conclusion that, however she might have gone to Fordyce's head, her own, as far as he was concerned, was perfectly steady, and her heart quite untouched. "And a good thing for Cassie," he said to himself. Like everyone else, he liked Cassie. No, the man was elsewhere to seek; probably not in New York at all.

Since he could not awaken that particular interest which would have given the portrait the touch he wanted (and how he would have loved to see the perfect face light up with that divine fire!), he must make shift to

do without it. He hesitated between the look of detachment which made her so elusive and which had its charm, and the intelligent animation with which she responded to his experiment in telling her about himself as an artist rather than as a man. Meantime, the portrait fell just short of completion. Isabel began to be impatient and Lansing grew suspicious. Why had he let the fellow have the chance. And, strangely enough, the atmosphere at home seemed to become a little strained. Or was it Isabel's imagination?

It was really nothing that you could put your finger on. Once or twice Cassie, the most cheerful and even-tempered of mortals, had spoken sharply to a servant—an unheard-of thing in that house—and lately, when she was off guard, Isabel had surprised a worried look on her face. And then, when Isabel began to speak about going home, and had prepared herself to meet affectionate urgency to stay, there was an entire and disconcerting lack of opposition to her plan. Well, after all, Cassie had probably been thinking only of the portrait at the time.

"I wish Mr. Dane would finish," Isabel had said, "for I really do think I ought to go to Ptolemy."

"What's the matter with the portrait?" asked Cassie.

Did Isabel only imagine there was sharpness in her tone? "I hardly know," she said. "He paints out and paints in. When I am allowed to see it I think it is all right—and better-looking than I have any right to ask of it. But he tries on expressions just as I try on a hat."

Cassie reflected for a moment. "Let's take Dicky to see it," she said. "I know a portrait painter who says he has great confidence in a child's opinion."

They took Dicky to the next sitting and the portrait was set down on the floor against the wall, so that he could see it satisfactorily. On this occasion it had its detached expression; the look of one who knows a pleasant secret and isn't going to tell it.

"That's my baffle Aunt Isabel," said Dicky. "But she doesn't look at me like that."

The artist, who had been studying the child, turned quickly and surprised on Isabel's face the expression with which she did look at Dicky. He lifted the portrait and put it on the easel. This was what he wanted. This, and not the other, was the divine fire. Beside it, that other expression seemed wholly of the earth. He was glad he had not found it.

"Stay a while, Dicky," he said. "I'll have the picture finished pretty soon and then you shall see it again."

He turned to Cassie. "Leave the little chap and his nurse," he commanded, rather than requested. "I want him."

Cassie saw fire in his eye and instantly agreed. When she was gone Dane turned to the nurse.

"Keep him right here," he said. He pulled out some illustrated magazines and threw them on the floor. "Here, Dicky, look at these." Then he went to work like one inspired.

It did not take so very long. Dicky exhausted the pictures and made a tour of the studio, called back now and then by Dane and bidden to tell his aunt what he had found.

At last the artist threw down his brushes. "I can't do any better," he said, with a long sigh.

Carefully he lifted the painting down to the floor again and stood on guard over it, lest an eager child make a rush. "Here, Dicky," he said. "Is this the way she looks at you?"

The child regarded it solemnly and, for a moment, in silence. He clasped his hands ecstatically. "It's just my Aunt Isabel," he said. "I want it. May I have it?"

"Some day, Dicky," said Isabel, smiling. She had eyes only for the child.

"Don't you want to see it too?" asked Dane.

He lifted it and set it on the easel again, and made her stand where she would get the best light. She looked at it without speaking. At last, with a quivering sigh, she turned to him.

"Paint it out!" she said to him in a low tone.

"Paint it out?" He took a step between her and the picture. "It's absolutely yourself—and the best thing I ever did."

"I don't want the whole world to see my naked soul."

"Your soul will bear looking at. But don't concern yourself. The world is blind and stupid—and even if it were not, it would only see half."

Again she sighed, seeing the futility of her appeal. But she wished he had left the portrait as it was.

When they were saying their good-byes, he said: "I owe you and Dicky the rarest of all things—a sense of pure satisfaction with my own work."

To himself he added, after he had closed the door behind her—"And if she marries and has a child of her own, will she ever look like that? I doubt it. In the place of poignancy there'd be complacency!"

He stood long before the picture, absorbed in every technical detail. "By Jove!" he said, "that's a good piece of work!"

LXVIII

"WHERE's everybody?" called Fordyce from the foot of the stairs.

"I'm here," said Isabel, coming out of her room. "But I shan't be here long." She came down the stairs as she spoke. "Cassie went to pay some visits which I didn't have to make and is to send back the carriage for me to join her at the Wentworths' reception. It ought to be here now."

"It's here. Are you in a hurry for the reception? Can't you take me in and stop by the way for a few minutes? Dane tells me that he finished the picture this morning and I came home early on purpose to get you to go with me to see it." He did not add that he had heard Cassie make the arrangement for the afternoon.

"I can drop you there," said Isabel.

"And come in just for a minute with me," he persisted. "I want to compare the portrait with the original."

"Not at all necessary." For some unexplained reason she did not want to go to the studio with him.

Nevertheless, there seemed to be no real cause for refusing. She was glad, however, to find that Dane was not at home. When Lansing came back to the carriage and told her, she wondered why he didn't get in. Instead, he held the door open for her.

"We're going up, just the same," he said. "I have the freedom of Dane's studio."

"But I haven't," said Isabel. She went with him, however, for again there seemed to be no good reason why she should refuse, except that she was wondering uncomfortably whether he would see as much of her soul as the artist had done.

The easel, with the portrait on it, was turned away from them as they entered, and was placed where it got

the best of the waning afternoon light. Isabel stayed near the door while Lansing walked around until he faced the picture. There he stood, silent and motionless. She could not see his face, as the easel was between them. She had an uneasy sense of tenseness in the atmosphere and thought better of an impulse to join him. She remained where she was and suddenly began to consider whether she might slip out of the room and leave him there. What a pity that one cannot always recognize one's heaven-sent impulses! She thought it would be a childish trick. Instead, she spoke:

"I really ought to go on, if you've looked long enough."

He moved then and came toward her. His back was to the light and she could not see the expression of his face. It was the huskiness of his voice that startled her.

"You can't go," he said, and put out his hand as if to detain her.

In a lightning flash her eyes were opened. The shock was dizzying. For an instant she stood quite still. Then, with a woman's instinct to bridge an abyss with a laugh, she said lightly:

"Oh, but I must. Cassie will be expecting me." She turned quickly to the door.

"No matter," he said, still in that husky, strained voice. "Nothing matters outside of this room. Good God, Isabel, can't you see——?"

"I see it's getting late," she said, still lightly. Oh, if she could only get out of the room before he said anything more. Unspoken things could be ignored. She had her hand on the knob.

He put his over it. "You shall not go like that!" he said passionately. "Look at me! Just once with that look in your eyes. . . . How did he get it? Were you looking at Dane like that? He does that to women—but not you—good God, not you!"

"Take your hand away!" She spoke in a smothered voice, suppressing the shiver that ran through her. She stood rigid until his hand dropped to his side. "How can you insult me so!" she said then. "I was looking at

Dicky. I never knew how I looked—I didn't want Mr. Dane to leave it so—and I owe you no explanation."

"Isabel! You should have been mine! I knew it once and like a fool I let you go. You loved me once!"

"Never!" She flamed with anger now. "You tried hard enough to make me. You turned the head of a child, but it wasn't love. I never loved anyone but Dick. And you—have you no decency? Do you forget Cassie? She's far, far too good for you!"

"You make me forget everything," he said doggedly. "I choose to forget everything for you."

She drew herself up. "Once you might have chosen that. You controlled yourself quite easily then. You wait till now—now when you can do the most harm—now when you can hurt Cassie and me so dreadfully——"

"Is it nothing at all to you," he said, "that I'm suffering the tortures of the damned?"

"That," said Isabel, "does not concern me."

She opened the door and went out. . . .

That evening she said to Cassie: "Now that the portrait is finished I really ought to be going home. Norah has written about things—and I think I'd better be off to-morrow."

At last! thought Cassie.

Isabel had tried for her usual manner, but Cassie's sharp wits were not deceived. She knew that something had happened. She was fair-minded enough to acquit Isabel of everything but stupidity; an unpardonable sin. She ought never to have let anything happen.

Isabel felt humiliated, heart-broken, almost guilty. The forms of friendship were kept up between them, but both knew that the parting was for an indefinite time. And Dicky! *There* was a grief indeed!

LXIX

It was with a sore and bitter heart that Isabel travelled homeward. It seemed to her that never before, even in the keenness of fresh bereavement, had she felt so alone in the world, so bereft of all natural ties; for always hitherto, she had had a comforting sense of Cassie in the background, with her sisterly interest and love. And now, through her, Cassie had received that cruellest hurt. Oh, why couldn't she have had a seeing eye and taken herself away before things came to such a pass? Was ever anyone so stupid? Which, if she had known it, was just what Cassie was at that moment asking.

Michael met her at the station, with his warm Irish greeting and his voluble explanation that, but for the shortness of the notice, Mrs. Gifford would have been there.

"'Tis herself that's sorry," said Michael, "but she's having a dinner party, and she'll be over in the morning."

It didn't matter, Isabel said; and told him she was glad to see him and Norah; but her spirits sank still lower. Yet when she reached the house, all alight to welcome her, and was met at the door by Norah, overflowing with affection, her heart was a little lightened. After all, it was good to have a home to come to. There was a fire in the parlor and in front of it a small round table was laid for her supper. It looked very cosy.

"I thought ye'd like it here to-night," said Norah. "And now let me take off yer things and you sit down by the fire till I bring yer supper. I've waffles for ye, and cinnamon and sugar for them."

Waffles with cinnamon and sugar! Isabel hadn't seen or heard of such a thing since she left Ptolemy. She ate and drank and wondered somewhat scornfully why her spirits should rise with the comforting of her body. But

after supper was over and she sat by the fire her thoughts went to the empty rooms across the hall. It seemed as if Uncle Brenton must be there, just on the other side of the door. Norah came back and forth, clearing the table, mending the fire, and hovering over her.

"Are the other rooms lighted?" she asked.

"Sure, it's all lighted," said Norah. "I wouldn't lave a dark corner." And then, as Isabel rose from her chair—"But ye'll not be going over there to-night?"

Isabel looked down into the kindly, anxious face. She patted Norah's stout shoulder and took an affectionate survey of her, as she stood there in her black gown, with a white apron around her comfortable, middle-aged waist. "Oh, Norah," she said, "you do look so good to me. And I do believe you've got on your very best dress and have cooked supper in it."

"Sure I have," said Norah, smoothing herself down. "'Tis the black silk ye sent me when ye were on yer wedding journey. It's always been me best. And now will ye be goin' up to yer own room?"

"No, Norah, I must go into those rooms to-night. I—I can't go to bed and feel them there—waiting for me."

"Sure an' I know," said Norah. She went at once back to her kitchen, and wiped her eyes when she was out of sight.

When Isabel opened the door of the doctor's office it seemed as if she must see him sitting there; but no, he would be beyond in the little study, leaning back in the big leather chair, smoking his pipe, or writing at his desk. She went in and sat down there herself and covered her face with her hands. She believed then, and she never ceased to believe that he really was there, to welcome her back to his old home, to comfort her and tell her to take courage. . . .

The winter sun shone brightly into her room when she opened her eyes the next morning. Norah was softly making a fire in the fireplace. Life was not all bad; and coming back to Ptolemy to live in her own house was also an adventure. She rose to begin life over again.

LXX

ISABEL'S house was in the village, where the houses were close together. However, the street was wide and well shaded, and her little garden had not, like many of its neighbors, been stripped of its protecting fence. She cherished such measure of privacy as that gave her.

In the first hard days, when the memory of that last experience in New York was still fresh in its bitterness, she found some solace in putting her belongings in order; in trying to make the place livable without depriving it of its personality. The study, a place of dear memories, should be her own writing room—if indeed, she could ever carry out those plans which she had made with so much zest. The flavor had gone out of everything and her imagination seemed paralyzed. She pulled herself together on the resolve that, in spite of everything, she would be master of herself. Her mind should, it must, obey her.

Of visitors she had no lack. The people of the town came to see her, foremost among them her father's old parishioners. Amy Boyd came, less careworn now, since there were no new babies and the professors' salaries were a trifle more adequate now that the affairs of the university were prospering. With the Giffords there was a happy reunion. When Mrs. Gifford put her arms around her, Isabel realized with self-reproach that in counting herself alone in the world she had underestimated that kind old friend's affection. Judge Gifford made much of her, as he had always done in his humorous way. Edmund, for the moment, was away, delivering a course of lectures for which he had obtained leave of absence. He was highly thought of in the university and, it was said, could have whatever he asked for, in spite of certain trustees who were somewhat inclined to mark time, after

the fashion of a factory. Jessie was happy and well in her western home and would be coming east to spend the summer.

Lily Hazelton, of course, was among the first visitors—just the same Lily, touching her with caressing fingers and saying, "Sweet thing," exactly as she had done years ago when they met at their first army station. Isabel drew away a little at the remembrance.

"Beautiful as ever," said Lily, "and of course your colored clothes are so becoming." Isabel was wearing a violet morning gown.

"Now I," pursued Lily, "have never been able to bring myself to make any change in my dress." She sighed and smoothed back a cuff.

Isabel regarded her with curiosity. Lily was wearing the deepest, most immaculate black. The white ruche in her hat and her crisp lawn collar and cuffs still proclaimed her widowhood. In this setting her delicately tinted, fair face gained a softness and a distinction which it never had possessed in the days of her most artful management of colors.

She gazed around her with all the old-time envy. "How nice it is," she said, "for you to have a house of your own to come back to. Now I—" She paused and sighed.

"You have a father and mother to live with," said Isabel, banally enough.

"Oh, yes, and they are very, very dear and sweet (Isabel couldn't imagine anybody, even a daughter, calling Mr. and Mrs. Brainard "sweet"), but when one has lived independently one feels it to come back to even a partial dependence. "I suppose you know we have moved?"

"No."

"Yes, we really didn't care for the neighborhood any longer. There was a chance to sell the house, so now we have one—very tiny, to be sure, up on the hill, not far from the campus."

"It must be a change for your father and mother. Hadn't they always lived in the same house?"

"Yes, ever since they were married—but my dear—the

neighborhood was really impossible." Lily waved the neighborhood away with a gesture of her slim, black-gloved hand.

Isabel thought of the plain, elderly couple who had lived all their married life among the same friendly neighbors, and felt sorry for them.

A few days later Mrs. Gifford expressed herself with unaccustomed energy on the subject of Lily.

"I dare say you'll think I'm getting to be an uncharitable old woman," she said, "but I simply can't stand her pretenses. All the poppycock about her not being able to 'make any change' in her dress, for instance. The Brainards have very little money, poor things, and she is clever enough to know that she couldn't possibly make such a good appearance if she didn't hold fast to that costume."

"I think it makes a difference what people about you are doing," said Isabel. "You fall insensibly into the custom of the country. I realize that many people here wear black all their lives. It makes me feel very odd." She ended with a wistful sigh.

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Gifford. "You have done exactly right. When I compare you and Lily—well, it's a case of 'rend your hearts and not your garments.'"

Isabel laughed. The figure did not seem to fit Lily. Even in metaphor one could not picture her rending a garment.

"And then," pursued Mrs. Gifford, "the way she has dragged those two poor old things up to the top of the hill, so that she can get at the bachelor professors. You know Town and Gown have grown apart of late years—and the hill is a large natural barrier. I'll say for her that she lets the married men alone—but no great credit to her. She wants to marry again. I assure you she'll shed the weeds fast enough if she can get a chance that seems worth her while."

Isabel smiled and wondered. This diatribe seemed quite uncharacteristic of Mrs. Gifford, who was usually easy-going and disinclined to say hard things about

people. "Will she get the chance, do you think?" she asked.

"I hope not." Mrs. Gifford set her lips hard. "You see, she doesn't want to marry a poor man this time and the professors, as a rule, are not too well off, although the unmarried ones, as long as they stay unmarried, have money enough to live pleasantly. I suppose the only fairly good match is Edmund."

"And you certainly don't have to worry about him. I quite remember that he didn't like Lily."

Mrs. Gifford shook her head. "One can't be too sure. Men change in the course of time—and also, there are critical moments. She's making a dead set at him—and I imagine she knows how to cater to a man. She sits up there in that little house with her tea-table and her chafing dish—and keeps the old people out of the way. I assure you, she's popular among the men. They go there and meet each other and talk—and probably credit her with some of their own good talk. And she pampers them and looks pretty and appealing. And Edmund—well, the instinct of marriage—the desire for a wife and family of his own gets hold of a man. And then if a woman strikes while the iron is hot she's apt to get him, if she has any tact at all. Edmund ought to have married long ago. I love to have him at home, but I hate to see him miss anything he ought to have in life. And now—Lily is after him and I live in mortal terror lest she get him. If she could make him happy—but I'm sure he'd hate her after a while."

"From what I know of him," said Isabel, "I think he might. Only, I can't for a moment imagine him marrying her."

"You think my imagination is running away with me. Well, my dear, I only hope it may be."

To tell the truth, that was just what Isabel did think. She thought so all the more when, on his return, Edmund came to see her. There was such a sane, wholesome friendliness about him. Always, she reflected, he dropped back into the same comfortable comradeship, no matter

how long it might have been since they had met. To be sure, there had been that one startling episode when he asked her to marry him; an episode which seemed more and more unreal to her. Probably it had happened at one of those crises of which Mrs. Gifford had spoken, when the instinct to marry seizes a man. At all events it was buried in the past. She hoped she was going to see a good deal of Edmund. More than anyone else in Ptolemy, he spoke her language.

But, as the weeks passed, she saw him less often than she had anticipated. Of course he was busy catching up with his work, after his absence. When she dined at his mother's, either alone, or with a party of the people whom Mrs. Gifford wanted her to meet, he was as nice to her as ever, but she had disappointingly little of the intimate, intellectually stimulating intercourse with him to which she had looked forward.

Presently, however, in the other interests which began to fill her time and thoughts, she forgot to miss him. She made new acquaintances. The people whom she met at the Giffords' came to see her and invited her to their houses, where she met more people. Quite simply, she slipped into the innermost exclusive circle of the campus, the circle where there were many charming little entertainments. In her modest way, she was able in her turn to entertain these new friends. Edmund came when he was asked and made himself most agreeable.

She still meant to begin her novel at once. Writing table, paper, pens and ink, all were ready for her in the study, and even a typewriter stood on its table by the window. Yet from day to day she put off beginning, and was thoroughly dissatisfied with herself for the procrastination. It seemed that her mind still shrank away from all the plans and ideas which owed their beginning to that ill-fated visit.

LXXI

OF course if Isabel had known of Lily's Sunday afternoons she would not have chosen that day to go to see her. But it happened that, on this particular Sunday solitude became unbearable to her; nor did she want to see anyone to whom she would be tempted to unburden her soul—as she might have done to Mrs. Gifford. The longing for Dicky, which she had kept out of sight, in the back recesses of her mind, had burst all bounds and taken possession of her. She wanted him so dreadfully, wanted to feel him in her arms and to look into those blue eyes. A bitter rage at Lansing Fordyce surged up in her, and shame and sorrow at the thought of Cassie. Every bit of her soul felt sore.

She tried to read, but the words got no farther than her eyes and she threw the book down. She began a letter to Cassie. Surely they must not quite give up writing. She found herself weeping and a tear fell on the paper. She dropped the letter into the fireplace and touched a match to it. She went to the typewriter and gave herself a lesson in its use. That was calming, but not enlivening, and she soon got tired of it. Although she had been walking all the morning, she decided to go out again, and went to put on her hat and coat.

The gusty March wind blew violently in her face as she opened her door and stepped out. The winter snow, lingering late in that northern climate, still lay in patches in sheltered spots, and on the gray, uncovered ground there was, as yet, no tinge of green. "Horrid climate!" she said, as she fought her way against the wind, but it brought color to her cheeks and light to her eyes.

She walked far up on the hill and the day was waning when, on her return, she passed the Brainards' little house. It occurred to her that it would be a convenient time to

go in and return one of Lily's numerous visits. She was hating to go home to shadows and memories.

She would not have been admitted if it had occurred to Lily to deny herself to unexpected visitors, but as no woman had yet been known to come on a Sunday, the maid let Isabel in. When she heard the voices she thought it was too late to withdraw. Yet she stood for a moment on the threshold of the parlor before anyone saw her.

The corners of the room were dusky, but the tea-table was in a lighted space. Lily's face shone out white above her black gown. She was smiling up at Edmund Gifford, who stood near her, tea-cup in hand. There was an open fire and in front of it two men were talking and smoking. Another was sitting near the tea-table, evidently having a bantering argument with Edmund. It all looked intimate and attractive. Isabel felt more and more annoyed at herself for being there.

It really was but an instant before Lily saw her and sprang up. Her cordial manner was extremely well put on and Isabel was grateful to her for it.

"But this is delightful!" exclaimed Lily. "I had been wondering so much what had become of you, and now you just complete our little circle. You know everybody here? Mr. Lang, Mr. McAlpine, Mr. Harding—I suppose I ought to say Professor to all of them, but you know nobody is professorish here. Come and sit down right here by the fire—you don't mind smoke. Doesn't it remind you of our dear old army days?"

The man by the fire offered her a chair with alacrity, but it was Edmund who brought her a cup of tea, after which he drew up a chair for himself and sat down by her. He had been quick to see the little embarrassment which no one else had detected. One of the two men, after standing about for a moment, strolled to the tea-table, and presently the other followed him. Not but what either of them would willingly have stayed to talk with Mrs. Malden if Gifford had given them a chance. Coming in tingling and glowing after her battle with the wind, she had brought into the warm, dim room a suggestion of

open-air freedom and buoyancy. Beside her Lily seemed bleached.

"I really had no idea," she said to Edmund, with a half deprecating laugh.

"You had no idea how sophisticated we had become in Ptolemy. The Sunday salon was unknown when you lived here."

"Ptolemy is much nicer now. At least, the campus. The people there don't seem so careworn as they used to."

"You frequent the upper stratum where they have good salaries and time to amuse themselves."

"And work enough too—which they do."

"They're obliged to do it. You sound envious of the work. Does time hang on your hands?"

"On, I'm constitutionally busy—and so I don't do the right things. Don't you know what makes time shortest of all? It's keeping on not doing the thing that you intended to do—that you most want to do. It's always to-morrow—and to-morrow is over before you know it has begun."

"I know. It eats up your life and leaves you dissatisfied. But why not make a plunge and begin?"

"I'm putting it off till this evening. And this evening I'll put it off till to-morrow."

"So you're planning another novel."

She laughed. "Of course it's easy for you to guess. And I never meant to let a soul know of my presumptuous ambitions. But you are very safe."

"Don't write anything that you must keep secret."

"I never shall. Only while I'm trying to do it. One really must keep one's own counsel then—little as I seem to be doing it. Perhaps you think because I've told you so easily——"

"I believe I think it's natural for you to let me into the secret. You know I was the only person—at least, I think I was the only person who found you out before. That was an extraordinary thing—a girl of your age doing such a thing and keeping it absolutely to herself."

"I had an idea of telling you," she said, playing with

her teaspoon. "You wouldn't have let me publish it, and of course I ought not to have published it."

"But why?" he began, and stopped with a sudden thought of the possible reason. "How did you manage the details?" he asked.

"Oh, Uncle Brenton knew I was doing something, because I had to ask him to let my mail come to him. He didn't take it seriously—and was horrified when he saw it. And you—you were really the cause of it, you know."

He smiled. "I've always wondered if a conversation at one of our lessons started you."

"I began it that very day. And you helped me all along too."

"Of course I tried to set you in the way of writing English, but that was very little."

"You helped me by telling me that I couldn't do anything without applause—that I wouldn't work on a desert island. So whenever I got tired of it and wanted to give it up I said I *would* work on my desert island. But after all, you were right about it."

"I don't quite see it. It seems to me that I was signally wrong."

"I can see that I always meant to tell you some time and get your applause. I thought I was so clever. But you didn't applaud me to any great extent that one time when you did speak to me about it."

"I'm sure I admitted cleverness. It *was* clever. But you'll do a great deal better now. Just for the moment you are feeling as if you were on that desert island, and so you can't begin. Let me land on the island with you. Talk to me about it. But there's a better thing than talking. Begin! There's magic in beginning."

"I'll begin to-day—just as I did before."

"And, of course, you'll tell me how you are getting on."

They talked a little more before Isabel recalled her intention of staying only for a moment. She rose and set down her teacup. "I must speak to Lily and then go home," she said.

Edmund followed her to the tea-table.

"Don't go," said Lily, rising with alacrity, to speed the parting. She had hardly been able to endure the sight of the two, so absorbed in conversation.

"I only stopped in passing," said Isabel. "I'll come another day."

"Let me walk home with you," said Edmund. "It's quite dark."

Lily's fingers tapped impatiently on the back of the chair near which she was standing. This was too much and, in spite of herself, the sweetness of her tone could not quite cover a touch of sharpness.

"Do!" she said. "We can look over those pictures another time." She glanced, as she spoke, at the portfolio which he had brought, at her request. He had not intended to show her the pictures, only to leave them with her.

"It isn't in the least late," said Isabel. "It only looks dark from inside. I came out for an unfriendly solitary walk and you must let me go on with it. Good-bye."

She went quickly to the door and turning, smiled at them all before she disappeared. With her departure some vitality seemed to go out of the atmosphere.

Edmund outstayed the others, as Lily had intended him to do, and showed her the photographs. It bored him to show pictures to a person who had not his associations with them.

LXXII

ISABEL felt like a schoolgirl again, working under a spur. She began her novel that night and, under the impetus of her conversation with Edmund, wrote a first chapter which pleased her. She read it over once more just before she got into bed and asked herself half incredulously, whether she could keep up the pace. "But I *will*!" she said, as she put out her light.

The next morning things did not go so well. She wrote and rewrote and destroyed. At the end of three hours she was just beginning to get into the swing of thought and expression when Norah announced luncheon and she had to stop. After that it was not easy to begin again. Besides, she wanted to get out of doors. When evening came she had written no more, but a visit from Edmund encouraged her.

"Show me what you've done," he said, and she obeyed.

It reminded them both of the days when he read and corrected her exercises in English.

"That's good," he said. "Really good. And now?"

"Nothing but drivel since that. It's easy to make a start, and so hard to go on."

"You'll come to smooth sailing again—by dint of cruelly hard work. Do you feel like telling me something about your plot?"

"I feel exactly like it, but I'm going to deny myself. Not because it would bore you, though I dare say it might, but because I'm afraid it would be an enervating luxury. I've an idea that what I have to say will gather more force if I keep it tightly bottled and only let it out on paper."

"You're probably right. Show it to me afterward. But you know I'm an incorrigible critic—and, I'm afraid, a confirmed schoolmaster."

‘I like your criticism. It’s fierce, but stimulating. I haven’t forgotten. And I need something to drive me. Oh, you were quite right about the desert island. My mind isn’t a kingdom to me unless it is stimulated by contact with other minds. It gets stodgy. But if a competent person is going to overhaul me—that makes all the difference. It’s very good of you.’

He looked at her across the library table. They had unconsciously taken the old positions they had been used to occupy when she came to his study as a pupil. He recalled her as she was then; the ardor of her seeking mind, the eager intelligence with which she responded to his guidance, the impatience to begin and accomplish which had carried her through the extraordinary undertaking of her book, and then—the radiance of her girlish beauty. She was not less beautiful now, he thought. The years, with their sorrows, had matured her, but had made no conquest. And the ardent, seeking mind was still hers, and the determination to achieve. How interesting it would be to watch and to help her.

‘Suppose you abandon that stiff chair,’ she was saying, ‘and take an easy one, by the fire. I have cigars and cigarettes which competent judges tell me are fit to smoke.’

‘You didn’t learn to smoke, yourself, while you were abroad?’ he asked, as he took the seat she suggested.

‘Could I ever have come back to Ptolemy if I had? Besides, even if I had wanted to, I don’t think Margaret could have borne it.’

‘How is she, the good Margaret?’

‘Always the very best Margaret. She’s a person you can count on, whether you can on anyone else or not.’

A shadow came over her face and he looked at her curiously.

‘Are you writing something, yourself?’ she asked.

‘I’m usually writing something,’ he told her, ‘but nothing of very much account. Students pick my brains dry. However, I shall take a sabbatical year soon, and then perhaps——’

That was the first of many evenings which he spent with her. As far as she knew, he still may have gone to Lily on Sunday afternoons and perhaps at other times, but it hardly seemed to her that his mother's fears could have any real foundation. He was so exactly his old self, just as she had always known him, except during that one brief, amazing episode. How unreal that seemed to her now, and how uncharacteristic! The real Edmund was this friendly, whimsical, thoroughly human man of intellect; a man with a very particular genius for friendship, both with men and women; sympathetic, quick-witted, domineering at times, sure he was right and that one must go his way, yet always, with a laugh and a shrug, recognizing his own foibles. This was not a man to concentrate his affections on a wife and to sit quietly by his own fireside. For him, an open house of his own and a welcome at many firesides. Certainly the warmest of welcomes at hers.

Of course Ptolemy would have talked if Ptolemy had known, but Isabel received few other visits in the evening, so that Edmund was seldom met at her house except when she invited him there with other guests. Without any intention of concealment on the part of either of them, their growing intimacy was kept out of the public eye. Yet in one case Isabel did purposely avoid mentioning it. She had quoted some saying of his to his mother, and had added, quite innocently:

"You know Edmund comes to see me sometimes and I always enjoy him."

Mrs. Gifford had looked so greatly pleased and, withal, had given her such a sharp glance that she was vexed. Edmund's mother, she told herself, was too ready to imagine things. She had alarmed herself so much and so groundlessly that now she wanted to turn matchmaker to keep him safe from Lily. After that she refrained from mentioning his visits.

Meantime, she was writing diligently and, from time to time, showing Edmund what she had written. As he had said of himself, he was an unsparing critic and an

urgent one. She didn't always agree with him and they had hot arguments.

"I really think," she said to him once, "that your criticism helps me almost more when I think you are wrong than when I know you are right. When I disagree with you it is as if you drove my mind with whip and spur and it goes on the gallop. In trying to answer you I get ideas I've never had before and never should have had, and it helps me a lot."

"That's gratifying—and shows you are worth criticising."

He was always willing to see when she was right and to admit it handsomely. "Far be it from me to meddle," he said once. "You are quite capable of carrying the thing through without any help of mine."

But it was not possible for him to keep his hand out. In half an hour he might start a fresh discussion and would be as sure as ever that he was right. It was one Saturday evening that, before leaving her, he issued orders to her to rewrite a certain chapter within twenty-four hours. "You must do this," he said, "while the iron is hot. Make the first draft to-night, if you're not too tired. Anyway, work at it to-morrow morning and in the afternoon I'll drop in, if you'll let me. Perhaps you'll give me a cup of tea."

On that occasion Isabel never gave a thought to Lily and her Sunday tea-table, but when he came again the next Sunday, and again the next, she wondered what Lily was thinking about his defection and thought how relieved Mrs. Gifford would be if she could know. But the good lady had to do without that comfort. . . .

Spring came on reluctantly, with many advances and retreats, as is her custom in that unfriendly climate. Isabel, usually impatient of the season's slow advance, noticed it so little now that she was surprised when her garden burst into bloom; surprised, too, at her own peace of mind. She still felt the hurt of that winter evening of her New York visit, still longed for Daisy and had pangs of self-reproachful distress at the thought of Cassie,

but she resolutely pushed those thoughts into the background. She wrote to Cassie from time to time—that one thing she would not give up, and she could only hope that in the future Cassie would not be sorry to have kept up their intercourse, although at present she responded seldom and briefly.

In other ways Isabel's time and thoughts were fully and agreeably occupied. From the time she got up in the morning until she unwillingly went to bed at night she found plenty to do, and only wished that the days might be longer. Her garden and her writing-table competed for her attention of a morning; her books always awaited her pleasure; and her few old friends of the town and her many new ones of the campus contrived to fill as many of the later hours of the day as she would give to them. As for Edmund, he was now an inspiring habit.

LXXIII

It sometimes seemed to Isabel that the novel was too solidly planted on its feet. It marched, yes—but it did not soar. And sometimes her imagination felt its wings and longed to try them in the upper air. But she was working under a master, and stimulating though Edmund was to her intellect, her imagination shyly withdrew itself from his expert criticism. There were moments when her spirit demanded solitude.

It was at such a moment that she left the pile of manuscript in its drawer and seated herself at her typewriter with fresh paper before her. She told herself apologetically that it was only a short story she wanted to write and that perhaps she would do her real work better if she got this off her mind.

All the morning she worked. She was learning at last to think on the typewriter and found that it far surpassed the pen. The little story shaped itself under her flying fingers and, from some subconscious realm of her mind, came thoughts and words and phrases which, it seemed, she could never deliberately have devised. When Norah came to call her to luncheon she looked up, dazed. The room seemed quite unfamiliar to her and Norah's voice came as from a distance. With an effort she brought herself back, looking about her and placing the familiar objects. Then she rose with a long sigh. Could she recapture the mood?

She did recapture it, helped by the habit of voluntary concentration acquired in the weeks of hard work. It was wonderful to her to find that, under favoring circumstances, the wings of imagination could be made to bear her up at her bidding. When, at the end, she read over what she had written, she was elated. Faulty it was,

careless and diffuse, but it had a quality which had been in nothing else which she had ever written.

And now to correct the faults. Not for this would she consult Edmund. Between them, they would clip the wings of fancy and bring the poor butterfly fluttering down to earth. She corrected and condensed and rewrote, but always with a care to free rather than to fetter the elfin child of her soul. Then, when she had done all that she could, she signed her name and sent the manuscript to the editor of the magazine for which she had the most regard.

Edmund wondered that she had nothing to show him and reproached her with laziness.

"I'm not lazy," she replied. "But I've wondered sometimes whether I had it in me to do anything alone—whether I wasn't depending on you too much." She was tempted to tell him about the little story.

He was silent for a moment, looking at her somewhat intently. Then he smiled. "But why not depend on me?" he said. "I'm always here."

"And always good to me—even when you browbeat me. But after all, I must learn to do my own work."

"Must you? Really, you know, my help doesn't amount to much, except to keep you from feeling alone on your desert island. And I like being there with you."

"Oh, I certainly like to have you. Don't sail away. I'm coming back to you with a big bunch of manuscript some evening—for you to tear to pieces."

"Why not for me to approve? Very well, since you don't dismiss me altogether, perhaps you'll turn about and give me some criticism yourself. I'd like to bring a little thing of my own to read to you. Our discussions have started me off and I've experimented a bit."

She leaned forward, her eyes shining. "Oh, if you would let me hear it! I'm immensely flattered."

It was just at that moment, when he smiled into her eyes, that a little uneasiness invaded her consciousness, though so slightly that she was able to put it aside and forget it.

He brought his manuscript—a short essay—and in response to her enthusiastic appreciation of the clever deftness of his touch, told her that it was she who had inspired it.

“In the matter of mental stimulus,” he said, “you give far more than you get.”

There was that in his voice which again disturbed her, and this time she was not able to forget it.

After her unhappy experience with Lansing Fordyce she had vowed that never again would she be taken by surprise in such a matter. In the future she would be wary to the point of exaggeration. Surely now it seemed an exaggeration of her imagination, of her self-conceit to think of Edmund in such a connection, so confident had been her belief in his brotherly friendship and in his immunity from feelings of another sort. That he had once professed to love her had not seemed to count in her estimate of him; but it counted immeasurably if it were indeed possible that he cared for her now in that way. It was unthinkable that she should be a second time surprised by Edmund, and it would be absolutely unpardonable. And yet—if it were all her imagination, how fatuous to discourage where discouragement was needless! She blushed with shame at the thought.

For all that Isabel had never been foreseeing in such matters, the latter years had not left her quite without experience in the delicate art of withdrawal from advances which she could not encourage. But what a thankless task it was to set about a gradual separation from a friend to whom she was attached. She loved Edmund's visits, loved all their intercourse. Without him, she felt that she would be horribly lonely. Yet it did not then occur to her to ask herself why, under those circumstances, she should put him away from her.

She rose the next morning, planning her day as usual; but the flavor was taken out of all her pursuits. She took her manuscript out of its drawer only to put it back again. She busied herself more successfully in manual labor among her flowers, but she worked without zest.

Fortunately she was invited out that evening and felt that she had gained a breathing space. Edmund was at the dinner and seemed so altogether natural that she told herself she had been imagining things. With immense relief she gave herself up to enjoyment; and when he came the next evening she felt that everything was simple and natural again.

But again there were disturbing indications. Now that her eyes were open nothing escaped her. There could be no dalliance with the situation. She must address herself to the difficult task of setting up an invisible, impalpable barrier between herself and him.

It was not easy, when she received a flatteringly prompt acceptance of her story, to keep from telling him about it. She was immensely elated and it was lonely business, keeping her elation to herself. Some day he would see it published with her name. How surprised he would be! And how she was always going to miss him!

LXXIV

ISABEL saw very little of Lily nowadays and would scarcely have thought of her, but for an uncanny feeling which grew upon her that Lily was watching her. She had had that impression ever since the evening when Lily had so surprisingly dropped in on her; surprisingly, because they had exchanged no evening visits. The distance was great and there were, as yet, no street cars.

Edmund was with her at the time (this was in the hey-day of their friendship), and it happened that, for once, they were not in the study, but in the larger room in front. It was a mild evening late in May and still quite light. They were standing at an open window, discussing some matter of gardening. In that, as in so many other things, Edmund was an adept.

Lily hated walking, but she had for some time been wondering what Isabel did with herself of an evening when there were no entertainments going on. She had descended from her cottage on the hill on the chance of finding out. Coming from the other direction, she did not have to pass their window, but heard their voices before she came up the verandah steps, and came lightly. Also, she did not ring the doorbell. What need of such formality between old friends, especially as the door stood open, with only the green blind doors closed? She pushed the blinds apart and turned toward the voices.

"May I come in?" she called, and entered the room without waiting for an answer. "But this is nice," she went on, shaking hands with them both. "I walked all the way down, thinking you might be having a lonely evening—I've had so many of them myself. You quite got on my mind. But now I'm quite happy about you—and

I must only stay a minute and get home before dark. You know I was always such a ridiculous coward about going out alone after dark."

But she did not go. Isabel displayed all the cordiality she could muster and Lily settled herself gracefully in a chair and stayed until long after twilight had given place to darkness. Isabel lighted a lamp and still she stayed. It was nearly ten o'clock when she jumped up with an air of suddenly recollecting herself.

"How could you let me stay so long?" she exclaimed. "I simply forgot that we weren't at the dear old post, where one ran back and forth at any hour—well, yes—" as Edmund picked up his hat and prepared to accompany her—"I'll have to let you go with me, though it's horrid to take you away. Won't you bring Isabel up some time and spend an evening with me?"

As the door closed after them Isabel wondered just what had brought Lily down there that evening. There was no reason why it should seem strange for anyone to find Edmund at the house of so old a friend as she, yet there had been an alert watchfulness in Lily's eyes which vexed her.

Lily did not come again for a long time, but there was another meeting between the three just at the time when Isabel had definitely made up her mind that she must break off her intimate friendship with Edmund. It was at a large reception during Commencement week. Edmund had joined her and they were standing a little apart from the crowd, enjoying the breeze which came wandering through a bay window. Lily came to them with an air of drifting, but with purpose in her hard blue eyes. Young Professor Lang was with her.

"Wise people," she said, "to get near a window. It's suffocating in that crowd." She folded up the big black fan which she had been languidly swaying. "One wouldn't have thought there could be such a keen little breeze."

Edmund glanced at Isabel's bare shoulders and at the little curly lock at the back of her neck which, loosened from the mass of her hair, was fluttering in the draft.

"Stand here," he said, standing aside to give her his place. "Just so that you don't have your back to the breeze."

She laughed at his carefulness, but moved as he directed, yielding as a matter of course, to his autocratic way, but became so aware of Lily's keen and malicious observation that she blushed, inopportunately and uncomfortably.

Lily added audacity to malice because she foresaw failure to her plan of leaving Mr. Lang with Isabel and taking Edmund away.

"I was thinking of our parties when we were in our teens, Isabel and I," she said, turning to him. "I remember you were a sort of missionary who went about showing people how they ought to behave. You separated all the couples and paired them off differently. Do you still do that?"

"How irritating I must have been. Do let me forget my disagreeableness. No, I shouldn't dream now of interfering with you in any of your little affairs."

Her head went up. "Oh, you didn't interfere very appreciably then," she said. "Our customs remained much the same, stupid as they were."

Edmund thought the retort good, especially for Lily, who ordinarily was nothing if not amiable toward him. He liked her very well at that moment and would have liked her better if she had then taken herself off. Instead of that, it was Isabel who, by some skilful management, presently walked away with Mr. Lang, leaving Lily surprised at the success of her scheme.

It was not a happy evening for Isabel, who found the business of turning cool to Edmund entirely hateful. When she took her leave early she found that he intended to drive home with her and that she could not prevent him. She fenced with him delicately during the drive and, when he had left her at her door and she had locked it and put out the hall light and gone to her room, she told herself that she must do something more decided. Yet, although she stayed awake for hours, she could not devise any plan but that of flight. She could accept those invitations from

her father and Margaret which she had intended to accept later. To be sure, she didn't want to go away, but what of that?

And yet it was still so intangible. Edmund implied a great deal, but so elusively that she needn't notice it if she did not choose. But she *must* choose.

Oh, why must such things happen? She had been more contented, really happier than she had ever expected to be again. She liked these people whom she was learning to know, liked her position among them, liked her house and garden and good old Norah and Michael. More than all, she liked Edmund himself and their happy comradeship. Oh, why couldn't he be satisfied with the friendship which she found so sufficing?

Nor did morning bring comfort. What it brought was a visit from Lily. Isabel greeted her cordially, glad of anything that promised distraction from her perplexities.

"I came early to have a nice long visit," said Lily. "We don't have them as often as we used to in the dear old days." She had brought her work-bag and took out a piece of her fine sewing. "I don't suppose you sew any more than you used to," she said. "Ah, well, you don't have to."

"You do everything like that so beautifully," said Isabel, with ungrudging admiration.

"It's just as it always used to be and probably will be all my life. I have to make my pretty things or do without them. I thought, for the summer, I'd wear these little mull fichus, but they have to be hemstitched."

She sewed for a while and talked of trifles, while Isabel leaned back lazily in a big chair, responding as far as necessary and reflecting that a conversation with Lily never did make much demand on one's intellect.

"I suppose that to you those old days when I used to bring my work over and sit with you must seem very far off and dim—*now*," said Lily.

"I don't see why 'now' especially," said Isabel. She wished that Lily would not constantly go back to the memories which she could not bear to share with her.

"Well, because it seems to me that life is opening freshly to you again." Lily spoke with a sentimental intonation, but cast a keen side-glance as she did so.

"Of course every time one comes home and starts again you might call it a fresh beginning, but it doesn't mean as much as all that."

"Oh, you can't possibly be as unconscious as you seem. And really, Isabel, you might confide in me—old friends as we are. I'd like to be the first to congratulate you."

Isabel suddenly sat up straight. "I don't in the least understand you," she said, but understanding had come to her and her voice was frigid.

Lily had laid down her work. "Of course you do understand," she said. "And I do think, Isabel, you might tell me about it. When are you going to be married?"

Isabel's face flamed. "How dare you?" she exclaimed.

"You act as if I had insulted you. How ridiculous!"

"I feel as if you had."

"Do you mean to say you are *not* going to marry Edmund Gifford?"

"You have no right to ask such a question and I am not obliged to answer you, but to make things perfectly plain I will tell you that there has never been such a thought between us."

"Then I must say—" began Lily. She picked with her needle at the work in her lap. "*He's* got the thought, all right," she said. "And if you haven't, then I think you've been behaving horridly."

"I don't think you need disturb yourself about Edmund," said Isabel coldly.

"I'm not troubling myself about Edmund." The color rose at last in Lily's cheeks. "I'm troubling about myself. I love Edmund, though I'd never have let you suspect it if you had been going to marry him. He was beginning to care for me—it wouldn't have been long before I should have been the one to announce a marriage. And then you came. You came to my house—uninvited—and took him away before my eyes. And now you say you don't want

him yourself. I don't believe you. I believe you do want him and have led me on to tell you——"

"Lily, don't!"

"You act," said Lily, "as if one had no right to marry again—but you'll do it, when you get ready. One doesn't bury oneself forever. We're both women, after all."

She stopped and waited until she could recover her usual manner. "Dear Isabel," she said, "do forgive me. And try to be a friend to me. It isn't, after all, quite impossible that Edmund should get back to where he was before you came. Won't you let him alone—since you really don't want him?"

Isabel stared at her, unable to frame a reply.

"Can't you see," said Lily, struggling with tears, "how difficult it is for me to open my heart to you in this way?"

"Difficult!" said Isabel. "It ought to be impossible."

Lily turned white to her lips. "I don't think," she said slowly, "that I can ever forgive you for that."

Her face was quite hard and expressionless now. At that moment she was a plain woman who looked her full age. She folded up her work, put it carefully into her bag and got up. Isabel watched her in silence, nor did she speak when Lily, pausing an instant at the door, went out of the room. There seemed to be nothing to say.

LXXV

ISABEL felt that she positively could not see Edmund that evening, for every reason. But he came earlier than usual, before she had time to carry out her intention of going out after dinner. Norah let him in, of course. It would never have done to depend on Norah to help her evade him.

As it happened, Edmund was at his best that night and so entirely undisturbing to her composure that she was fain to think that she had greatly exaggerated the situation. From moment to moment, she felt the nervous tension of the past twenty-four hours relaxing. She was able to put Lily and her horrid impertinence out of her mind as unworthy of another thought.

Edmund had been blind neither to her expression of worry and preoccupation during the early part of the evening, nor to the way in which that expression had yielded to her usual cheerfulness; the cheerfulness which he liked to think he had helped to restore to her. It was no wonder that he felt encouraged; no wonder that, after having shown consummate tact in his management of the situation, he should, just at the end, have spoiled his effect by a word, a tone, a glance, by the merest accentuation of his hand-clasp in leave-taking. But had he spoiled it?

When the door had closed behind him Isabel stood still for a moment, then walked slowly to the writing table, and sat down in the chair in front of it. She put her elbows on the table and rested her head on her hands. She felt almost dizzy, as if the ground had been cut away from under her feet. For she had felt, within herself, the most sudden, surprising, disturbing impulse of response to Edmund's call. She would almost have liked to cling to

his hand when he held hers for that unnecessary instant, although, as a matter of fact, she had withdrawn her fingers quickly. She was ashamed and overwhelmed and utterly astonished.

And then, for the first time, the thought invaded her mind—what if she should yield, instead of withdrawing? She raised her head and, sitting straight up in her chair, faced the idea and considered it.

Certainly, she had an affection for Edmund. As to that, she could hardly bear the idea of giving him up—as she would have to do. There could be no halfway measure of friendship between them any more. Probably she had as much affection for him as he would ever demand. Of course not the love she gave to Dick. That was different. But life with Edmund would be charming. He was so companionable, so altogether pleasant, and so stimulating. And dear Mrs. Gifford would be so pleased. She could be a real daughter to Mrs. Gifford; not like Jessie, of course, but a daughter near at hand and occupied in making the beloved son happy, even if she couldn't give him the love that was Dick's.

As for Dick, would she not go to him in that other world, which could not be a material world? She never doubted the existence of that other world, or of Dick and Uncle Brenton living in it. But Dick—since he was through with material things, would he care for that side of it, if she could be happy and less lonely while she was waiting?

Will he care—if I keep my soul for him?

Perhaps he wouldn't. Perhaps they didn't care over there for the things of this material world. But she herself cared dreadfully. And to keep her soul for one man while giving her body to another would be too revolting. No, she must give herself entirely or not at all. Edmund must be all in all to her, just as Dick had been.

She got up, walked across the room and back, then sat down again with flaming cheeks. Yes, there might be children. Her life, like other women's, might have significance. . . .

Dicky's blue eyes seemed to look into hers. There had been no child for Dick.

Then she tried to think sanely and unselfishly about Edmund. She could make him happy. Ought she to make him unhappy? Was she not fantastic and selfish? Almost the whole world married again and she hadn't the slightest objection to it—for them. She had even been glad sometimes to see a life renewed and made happy again—had said what a good thing it was. Why should it seem so different in her own case? Had she any right to sacrifice Edmund, who had been so unceasingly good to her? She hid her face in her hands, trying to make herself see things reasonably. Yet when she raised her head one thought stood out in her mind: *I have given myself once. To do it again—no, that is not for me.*

Fantastic perhaps—but she couldn't argue it away, this feeling that in giving herself twice she would be sacrificing her spiritual integrity. Isn't it—she asked herself—the way we deal with the things of the flesh that fits or unfits us for the things of the spirit?

In the end, what could she hold to, if not to her own standards—the standards that she had vowed not to forsake? She seemed again to hear Miss Pryor's voice as she said: "Hold fast to the things of the spirit."

LXXVI

For a week Isabel avoided Edmund as far as possible; denying herself to him once or twice and, when obliged to see him, retreating behind a shadowy wall of aloofness. He bore it well; looking at her out of eyes that were affectionately questioning and, at first, even somewhat quizzical, but gradually becoming graver in his regard.

She found her task difficult until one day a great and joyful surprise came to her and made her forget everything else. She received a telegram from Cassie, asking if she could put her up for a night.

Without a word having been said, Isabel had understood quite well that the old house would not be opened this summer. There was to be no chance for her to see Dicky, and she had no complaint to make. Probably Cassie was now coming to get the things which she would want elsewhere. Was it a sign of friendship or only a regard for appearances which caused her to come to her sister-in-law instead of going to a hotel? With a remembrance of Cassie's transparent honesty, she felt that if there had been no friendliness there would have been no visit to Ptolemy. Cassie would have managed to do without whatever she might want rather than come at all. With a glow at her heart she answered the telegram.

Cassie arrived late the next day. She greeted Isabel affectionately, but looked pale and careworn. During dinner she said nothing about the reason for her coming and Isabel had to treat the matter casually.

"Will you sit on the verandah?" she asked, as they came out of the dining-room.

"Let's go where we shall not be interrupted," replied Cassie. "I have something to say."

Seated in the study, she hesitated for a moment and turned still paler. Then with an effort, she said: "Lansing

has been very ill—is still very ill. He is always over-worked—and then an attack of grippe came. His doctors say—” her voice grew husky and she paused to regain control of it. “His doctors say that his one chance is to give everything up and go away. A long ocean voyage—a sort of unlimited voyage, stopping only at intervals in certain climates, is what they recommend. It’s very hard for him.”

“It’s dreadful!” breathed Isabel.

“We can arrange,” Cassie went on. “Things have been made easy for us—as easy as they could be—I mean financially. We let the house just as it stands. There needn’t be any delay about our starting. Only—the children. The things we do won’t do for them. I am advised—authoritatively—to leave them behind.” Again her voice failed and again she controlled it. “Will you take them?” she asked abruptly.

To Isabel, listening in sympathetic anguish, the words seemed unbelievable. Could she have heard aright? “Oh, Cassie!” she exclaimed, in a breaking voice, “how good you are to me!”

In truth, Cassie was great-hearted, but too, her need was great. When she had thought to take the children to Aunt Mary, Lansing had irritably and emphatically refused to permit them to be subject to the wanderings of a Methodist parson, who was due to change his abode within the year. And he wanted them in a different atmosphere anyway, he said. Cassie could not oppose him. For his sake and the children’s she buried whatever remained in her heart of bitterness toward Isabel. It was the easier since Lansing had turned to her with utter faith and dependence; with an affection, too, which seemed to show that his recent infatuation had been blotted from his consciousness.

She smiled wistfully at Isabel’s outburst. “I know you love Dicky best,” she said, “but Katrina——”

“I’ll love them both best!” cried Isabel, the tears streaming down her cheeks. “Katrina shall be no less dear than Dicky—and oh, to think that you will trust

me with them! I'll try to deserve it—and to do all you would want——”

Once more Cassie was her sister, dearer than ever before. Looking at her in her trouble, Isabel was ashamed of the ecstasy with which she thought of the children's coming.

Late into the night they talked and planned. “I'll leave you the key of the house here,” said Cassie. “You'll get what they need—their little beds——” But at that she broke down utterly and sobbed in Isabel's arms.

Later she said: “Of course we shall pay their expenses. We've arranged for that.”

“No, no!” exclaimed Isabel. “Cassie dear, you'll have so much use for your money. Do, do let me have them as if they were my own. I can do it, indeed I can.”

She thought with joy of the cheque which she had that day received for her story. What happiness to work for the children, to have them as if they were her own. What happiness if she should have to make sacrifices for them! She entreated, but could not shake Cassie's resolution to deposit money in the bank for their use.

“Very well,” she said at last, but resolved not to touch a cent of it. Cassie might need that money yet; and for herself, how she would work now that she had an object! What wouldn't she achieve!

They were to be brought to her within the week. “I must keep them as long as I can,” said Cassie, and Isabel's heart was melted with pity for her. Not while the mother was there could she let herself indulge in happy plans for them. Even after she had gone to bed she would not let herself arrange their rooms and picture them living there.

But in the morning, when she came back from seeing Cassie off on the train, she took Michael and went to the old house to get the things which they would need. How everything in that house reminded her of Dick and of his father! She longed to linger and lose herself in those memories, but to-day's demands pressed. She locked the door and turned to the future. That future, too, belonged to Dick

She went home to plan and arrange with Norah. "They'll make you more work," she said.

"I'll not be mindin' the work," said Norah loyally.

"And boys are more lively than girls," said Isabel, with pride in Dicky's enterprise.

"Me own baby that died was a b'y," said Norah.

"And mine," said Isabel softly; adding, "The little girl is a beauty. You'll love her as much as the boy."

"We will that," said Norah, with understanding. "An' how long will it be ye'll be havin' them?"

"Oh, a year or two. Until their father gets well and can come home."

She went about soberly for a little time. Cassie's great joy would be her own bereavement. But after all, why think about that now? Sufficient unto the day the good as well as the evil.

How much she must learn about the care of children. They would have their nurse, but she must know for herself. Above all, how good she must be! She went about her work of preparation, saying to herself: "I must be good. If only I can be good enough!"

How had she dared to think that a woman's life could have no significance if she had not children of her own? She thought of Miss Pryor and of her influence over generations of girls—not that she could ever be like Miss Pryor. When the time should come to give the children back to their mother she would be glad with Cassie—and other ways would open. For the present, let her take the gift of the gods and be thankful.

When Edmund came that evening she could hardly remember that she was trying to avoid him. However, the news with which she met him put him off, for the moment, as effectually as any avoidance could have done. She was so absorbed in her happiness, so eager for his sympathy, that there was nothing to do but give it to her with as much show of whole-heartedness as he could command. But he felt as if he had been put outside of her life. He would not submit to it without an effort to regain his footing.

"How about the writing?" he asked after a while. "Isn't the book to be finished?"

"Why, of course I shall write," she replied. "Indeed, I *must* write. While I have the children I want them to be wholly mine. I don't want to spend Cassie's money—and so I must write and earn some for them."

"Then it's to be commercial—the writing?"

"Well, yes, if you put it that way. But need it be the worse for that? Don't you get paid for your essays? Perhaps you think I'm vain to imagine that I could make money, but——"

She told him about the story. He listened, but said little.

"You don't mind?" she asked, feeling remorseful and cast down.

"You were quite right," he said, recovering himself. "You have the gift of imagination—and sometimes a critic with his carping is likely to put out that divine fire."

"But you've helped me so much. How could I ever have done anything without you?"

"I wish to heaven you did need me—as I need you!"

Too late she remembered. A look of dismay crossed her face.

He smiled ruefully. "Yes, you forgot. You've tried conscientiously to keep me from asking you to marry me. Is it really quite impossible?"

She paled, but met his eyes squarely. "Quite impossible," she said. "I'm so sorry—I oughtn't——"

"You've nothing to reproach yourself with. It's not your fault that I insisted on having it out." He hesitated, then went on. "People are apt to think I don't take things seriously, but you don't know how seriously I do take it, or how much I love you. You're really quite sure?"

"Absolutely." She hesitated in her turn. "As sure," she said at last, "as if the world did not call me free."

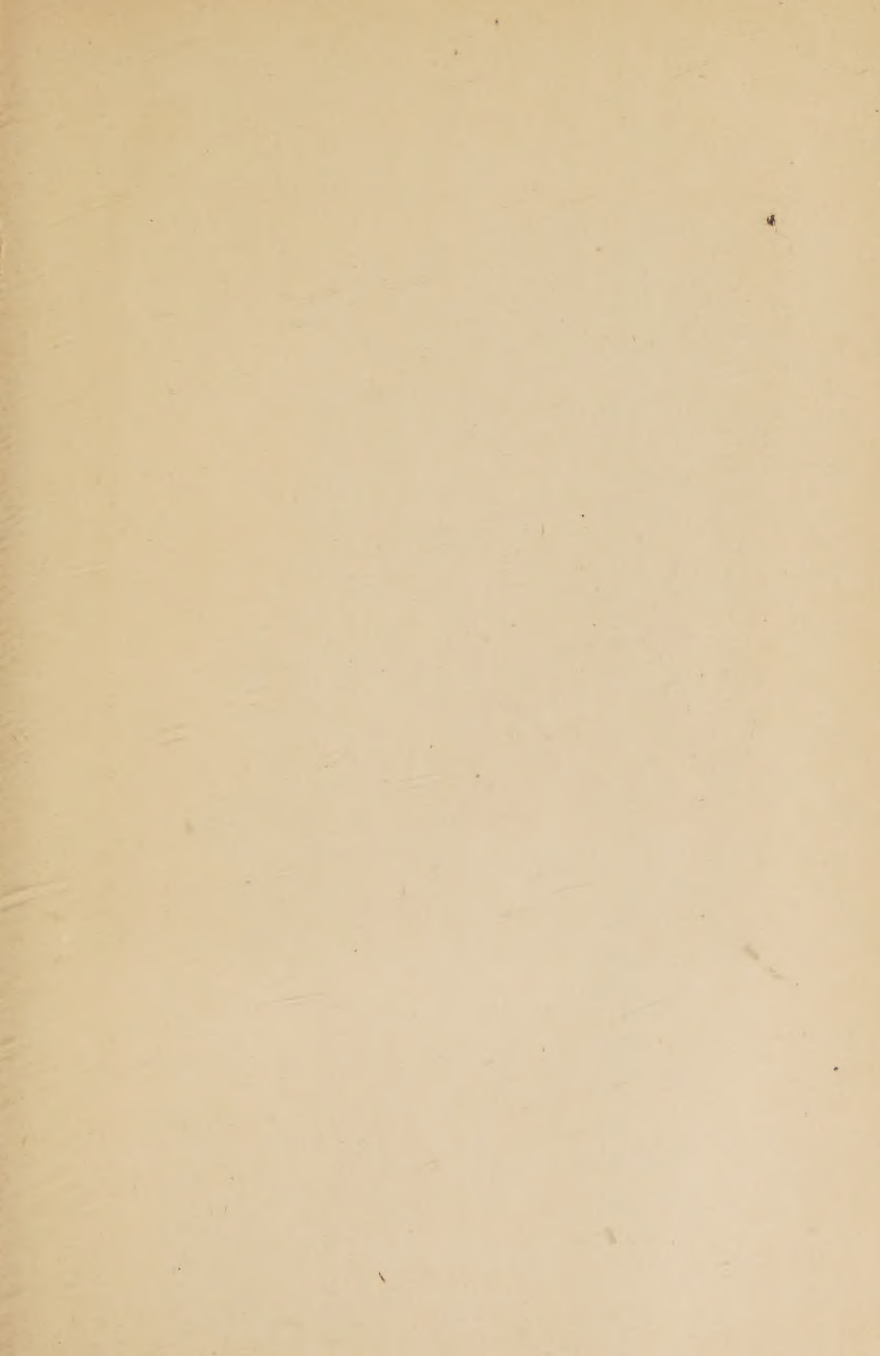
For a while after he had left her she still sat, filled with sorrow and regret, in the little room which had seen so many happy hours of comradeship. At last she got up

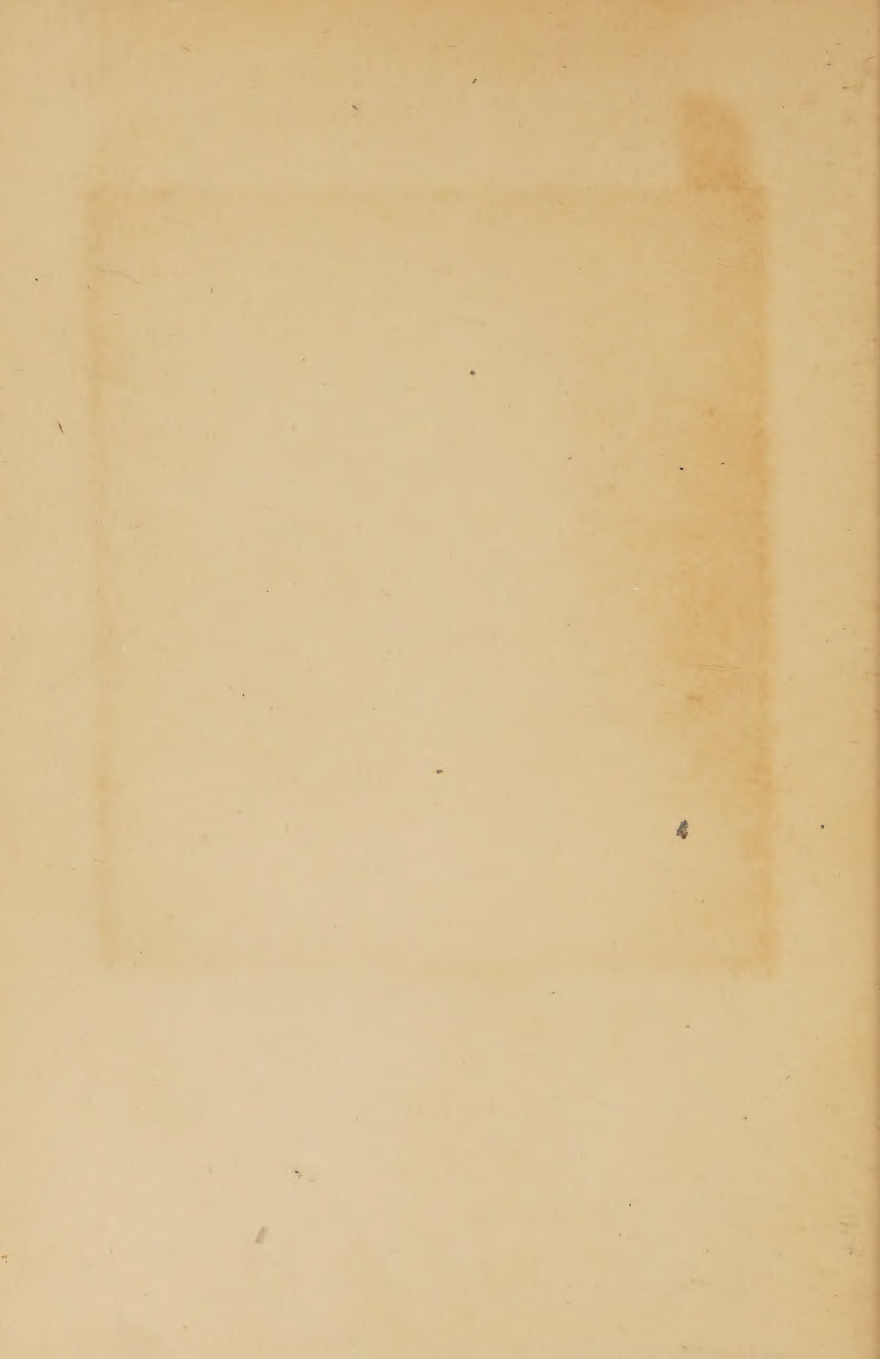
and walked about, closing the windows and extinguishing the lights. Then she went into the hall and put out the hanging lamp. By the faint light which came down from the upper hall she found her way to the door opening on the verandah and went out.

Around her was darkness. Masses of trees and shrubbery half concealed the neighboring houses, in which only an occasional light still twinkled. From the garden came the fragrance of roses; overhead stretched the immensity of the starlit sky. Gazing upward, Isabel felt her spirit once more uplifted. She was sorry, deeply sorry for Edmund; sorry for Cassie and for Cassie's husband. But for herself she was glad; glad of the life which lay before her, of the work which she was to do, of the trust which had been so wonderfully confided to her. She felt in herself a spring of joyful energy, an ability to meet whatever life might yet bring to her. She consecrated herself to the future and to the past. Never had she felt nearer to her husband than at that moment. Never before had she had a living consciousness of a great pervading beneficent power. Was this what they called God?

The night-wind blew fresh and sweet. She stood motionless for a long time. Then she turned and went into the house and softly closed the door.







Schaeffer

Isabdl Stirling

